

***Hanover School Committee Meeting Minutes***  
***February 3, 2021***  
***Virtual Meeting***  
***7:00 PM***

**Present:** Mrs. Leah Miller, Mrs. Ruth Lynch, Mr. John Geary, Mrs. Libby Corbo and Mr. Pete Miraglia

Also, Present: Matthew Ferron, Thomas Raab, Debbie St. Ives, Keith Guyette, Kelly Lawrence, Matthew Paquette, Daniel Birolini, Jane DeGrenier, Michael Oates, Matthew Plummer, Patricia Smith

**Call to Order:** Meeting was called to order at 7:01 PM by Mrs. Miller.

**Approval of Minutes:**

January 6, 2021: Motion entertained by Mrs. Miller to approve the January 6, 2021 School Committee Minutes as written. The motion was moved by Mrs. Lynch and seconded by Mr. Geary. The motion carried unanimously.

January 20, 2021: Mrs. Miller requested the Minutes to be tabled until the next meeting as the edited version wasn't sent out for approval yet.

**Report of the Superintendent presented by Mr. Ferron:**

I encourage families to please complete the election form process online. A few minutes ago, we had 1000 responses from families that are presently in the hybrid model. Of those responses, 99.3% indicated they are going to participate in the 4 full days in-person. Overwhelmingly positive on families looking to get students back to 4 days. There are challenges and issues to discuss that are ahead of us. Mrs. Smith is going to be discussing pool testing and we are working with our Hanover Fire and Health Department to make this work. We are learning more about this every day. On a personal and professional level, proud of this team to get where we are today. We have done a lot. It is because of the commitment from everyone on this call, from our staff, and our partners in the town. Thank you on behalf of myself and the central office team. Thank you to the teachers and for everything you have done. Parents and community members, we appreciate your support and patience.

**COVID Health Update**

Mrs. Smith: We continue to remain in the red risk zone which is the highest for community transmission. Happy to report all of our tracking data continues to trend lower. In the past week, new infections reported among our students and staff are lower than we have seen since before the holidays. We would like to thank our community for helping to limit the spread of COVID by following the guidance of the State. Although our numbers are improving, we are still seeing a steady level of new infection daily. Our tracking data is available on the Hanover Public Schools [COVID-19 dashboard](#).

Last week our district was approved by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to participate in the Department of Public Health COVID-19 pool testing program for schools. Pool testing is a method to efficiently and inexpensively conduct surveillance testing. The purpose is to identify and isolate any asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic infection in school, reduce the spread in our community, and provide reassurance when there is a negative test. Although participation is voluntary, we strongly encourage all staff and students to participate. The program will be stronger and more successful if we have a high percentage of participation. Pool testing involves mixing several test samples of a batch or pool then testing the pooled sample with a PCR test. If the pooled sample is negative, then all individuals within that pool are considered negative. If the pooled test is positive, then all of the individuals must quarantine and be tested individually. Pool testing will be conducted weekly for all staff and students who provide consent. Anyone who has tested positive in the past 90 days or is in quarantine, will be excluded from the pool test. The procedure involves a short nasal swab that goes two centimeters into each nostril. For our younger students, the test will be performed by a nurse or a Town of Hanover paramedic. Older students may self-swab under the observance of a nurse or other medical professional. This process will help us to identify asymptomatic carriers and will help to decrease the spread of COVID-19 in

the community and minimize the amount of infection in our schools. We are committed to using every resource tool available to keep our schools open as safely as possible. We have the people and infrastructure to lead the way with the initiative. We aim to conduct all of the testing on Fridays so if we do have a positive result, we can conduct further testing over the weekend and get all of the negative test students back to school on Monday. While we are in the hybrid model for the next few weeks, cohorts A and blue will test on Tuesdays so we can identify any positive pools on the remote Wednesday and implement testing right away. Our school nurses are currently making arrangements for a small pilot program for next week and we plan to roll out the full program after February vacation. Information letters and consent forms will be distributed later this week. Please return the consent form as soon as possible and reach out to your school nurse with any questions.

### **Questions:**

Mr. Miraglia: Are we planning to test the whole school over a certain period and how big are the pools?

Mrs. Smith: We would like to test every staff and student who has consented every week. The pools consist of between five to ten samples per pool. Initially, we will start with five samples per pool. If we have positive pools, it will minimize the individuals who are affected. Once we have a baseline, we can ramp it up to ten samples per pool.

Mrs. Lynch: Can you tell us why this is an advantageous approach then perhaps the individual testing?

Mrs. Smith: Individual testing will continue for symptomatic and close contact people which is a reactive approach. Surveillance testing is more of a preventative approach to get ahead of it to limit the number of students and staff that are exposed.

Mrs. Corbo: Please explain to parents and anyone who might not be clear what the process will be if a pool test comes back as positive? What will children and families be expected to do if that occurs?

Mrs. Smith: We are using the same vendor we use for the PCR testing. We have been getting our results by 9 pm the same day or the latest 6 am the following morning. Before the start of the school day, we will know which pools are positive. If you are part of a positive pool, you will receive a phone call from the school nurse and you will be asked to bring your child to the drive-thru testing at the Hanover Council of Aging. Once we get the results, you will know by Thursday if the test is positive or negative. When we move everyone to Friday, we will have 2 days to work it out. Results will be back by early Saturday morning, then we can get them in for individual testing and have those results by Saturday night or Sunday morning, so those that test negative can get back to school by Monday morning.

Mrs. Corbo: If for some reason they were tested on Tuesday, the pool came back positive. They then go Wednesday to be individually tested and the results are delayed. Can the students come to school on Thursday?

Mrs. Smith: Students will have to wait until their results come in even if they don't come in by 9 am. We decided to do this as a district. DESE guidance says it is allowed for them to come to school to wait for their results but because it is such a quick testing system, we thought it was more prudent to have them wait.

Mrs. Corbo: When you test on a Wednesday and are waiting for the results should you be in quarantine until the individual results come back? Or are they just not supposed to be in school?

Mrs. Smith: This is considered surveillance testing and assuming the person is asymptomatic, they are not considered in quarantine. We feel it is prudent because you have a one out of ten chance of being positive, to stay home until you get your test results.

**Public Comment: Community members had the opportunity to ask questions:**

- Will the pool testing be available for all grades including pre-k students?
  - Yes, it is available to pre-k through grade 12.
- Is there a certain percentage of students that we want to participate in the pool testing to make this effective or yield a favorable outcome?
  - Mrs. Smith this was discussed in our meeting today with our vendor. They do testing with 120 schools so they have a lot of experience with this program. No number makes it more or less effective. We would like to see 100% participation. Other districts are seeing 80% participation. Any information is helpful. The more participation we have the stronger our results will be.
- If the test comes back with a positive result, does the sibling of the student in that pool considered themselves to be part of the pool and stay home until the sibling gets their results?
  - The State has made it clear that the siblings of students of a positive pool do not have to stay home.
- If the results come back on Saturday, when can the children get tested in Hanover?
  - They can get tested on Saturday weather permitting.
- If a child already had COVID, that they no longer need to concern themselves with the pool testing?
  - The State recommends that you not have another test for 90 days as you may have lingering genetic material that could result in a positive test. Anything after 90 days would be considered a new test and you can participate in the pool testing.

Mr. Miraglia: Doing these tests raises anxiety. A number of families are nervous about this in general. Could you please state the real value of pool testing to the schools and the community?

Mrs. Smith: The value to the community is this:

- This really could help us reduce transmission of COVID in our community. There is asymptomatic spread and every asymptomatic carrier that we can identify could have an exponential effect on spread with other people.
- This can provide reassurance in our community. If we are not seeing a lot of pools, that is also psychologically beneficial to know that you are in a classroom with negative pools. Watertown hasn't had a positive pool in a month. As much as we would like 100% participation, if you feel your child is going to be negatively impacted by having a nasal swab, then it is fine to decline.

Mrs. Corbo: Does your participation in pool testing effect on whether you are able to attend 4 days in-person schooling should we move to that plan?

Mrs. Smith: Absolutely not. Your participation has no bearing on your ability to attend school in-person.

Re-Opening Update

School Committee:

Statement by HPTA President Ann Cotes: On behalf of the Hanover Teachers Association, we are very excited to welcome our students back to in-person learning in just a few weeks. We've been looking forward to this reunion for a long time, and we are grateful that our dedicated teachers and staff are ready to begin this exciting work. We know there are challenges ahead, and as always, we will work together to address these issues as they come. We care deeply about the success of our students, and we have the expertise and professionalism to ensure that all students will have the support they need to be successful. We are proud of the commitment, innovation, and courage our teachers have demonstrated daily throughout this entire pandemic, and we are proud to be part of a school system that is prepared to lead the way to support our students and community.

Mrs. Miller's statement: In-person learning in a SAFE environment has been a priority for this committee and administration from the beginning of this pandemic. Getting us to this point has taken a herculean effort by so many. I want to assure our community that you could not have a harder working nor smarter working district than

we have in Hanover. Over the last several days since we released our plan publicly, I have been contacted by school committee members from numerous districts in MA asking how we were able to achieve our goal. As I reflected on that question, I was able to point to many people and groups of people that helped along the way. We started back in the summer:

- Town officials who worked with us on spending and assistance in applying for COVID relief grants for the expenses we incurred to open our schools.
- Our DPW under the direction of Victor Diniak who worked around the clock to get our HVAC systems at each school to meet the increased air quality standards set forth by DESE.
- Hanover's health agent, Nancy Funder, reviews our COVID data daily and advises us.
- The Hanover Public Schools health team which includes our nurses and Tricia Smith.
- Our building-level administrators and district administrators put their personal lives on hold this year. The difference I see in our administrators is they were willing to look at impossible logistic challenges and work creatively and smartly to find solutions to them, so that it did not stop us from bringing our students back to school.
- Our School Committee - who although we do not always agree with each other - worked together with the students' best interest at the forefront of our work.
- Last but certainly not least, our teachers and staff - who have risen to every challenge presented to them this year of which there have been many!

Is this plan perfect? No, but I think we all gave up on perfect around March of 2020. Is it exactly what I would want? No but I am not the only one whose opinion matters. I am part of a committee that is part of an organization that is part of a community. I am slowly getting comfortable with living in the grey area when things are not black or white. I am proud of this plan and what it represents for our students and that is why I am voting in support of this.

Lastly, I want to thank all the parents that took the time to reach out to us to thank us over the last couple of days. Your kind words are greatly appreciated.

We are closing the hybrid model and moving into an in-person model. We know there are many "what ifs" that go with this model. The one that we have heard over the last few days is the "what if" my student is in quarantine and does not get to live zoom into the classroom. We hear the concern and validate the concern. The in-person model looks different than our hybrid model and for good reason. The teachers are going to have their students back in front of them. In many cases, their classroom size will have doubled from our hybrid model. We are allowing teachers the opportunity to do the work that they need to do to teach their students in front of them. We are hopeful that quarantines will go down because the numbers in the community are going down and more people are getting vaccinated as the spring rolls on. If we are seeing large quarantines we will reassess - just as we have all along. We decided to move forward with the plan because it gets our students back in the classroom where they will be best able to learn and succeed. We will continue to brainstorm and evaluate the tools we can use and implement when students are put on quarantine. We will not leave these students behind. We need some time to work on this, just like we needed time at the beginning of the year when we moved into the hybrid model. Be assured your district administrators, school administrators, and your child's teachers are already working on creative ideas to address this concern.

Mr. Geary's statement: I want to reach out, recognize, and thank all of the members of the HTA negotiating team, Carol Krall, Patricia Kinasewich, Laura Collins, Tom Hogan, Mary Ann Johnson, Tony DeFranzo, Ann Coates, and MTA Representative Chris Galvin. On the School Committee and district side, I would like to recognize Dr. Tom Raab, Patricia Smith, Debbie St. Ives, Rebecca Bryant, Matt Ferron, and myself. It was a long negotiation but we finished the way that this district always finishes. We worked together. We solved problems. We listened to each other and most importantly we trusted each other. When that happens, you get the job done. I thank the HTA, the teacher membership, and our negotiating team. The last few minutes were hours long but the person that rose to the top was Debbie St. Ives. She was able to listen to the room, listen to the HTA, and applied it to the needs of the district. When the district needed her the most, she stepped up. Kudos to her. Lastly, I would

like to thank Rebecca Bryant our legal representative. She was a rock star through the entire process from October until January. We could not have done it without her.

Mrs. Lynch's statement: Mr. Geary, you carried us at a time during this very difficult process. Here is my personal reflection on why I support this plan. I believe the same as many members of the community and this Committee; we believe learning is best when these children are in front of their teachers and that is why virtual learning was difficult for many kids. We knew this and we tried over the past several months to make decisions that not only would be best for the students but the teachers and community while keeping in mind that the safety and well-being of everyone was key. Thank you, parents, for your patience, willingness to listen, and offer concrete suggestions, ideas, and feedback. We appreciate and value your feedback. It is important to us. We encourage you to keep asking those questions. Students, there is no way we can ever express our gratitude to you for your patience, your maturity, and your understanding. There is no way we can understand how difficult and painful this process has been for you. Seniors, it is a wonderful time in your life. There are so many traditions that happen that you will never forget. Juniors, this is a critical year for you as you start to think about college. You need support from your teachers, guidance counselors, and each other. We thought juniors and seniors needed to get back to school. Most important of all teachers, thank you sincerely for your effort, hard work, dedication, and willingness to give it you're all! It is not a perfect plan but no plan can be. We are willing to try. I support this plan.

Mr. Miraglia's statement: My remarks are towards the teachers and families that are nervous and opposed to the 4-day return in the near future. I want to assure you that your voices have been heard. Hearing and weighing the opposing views has made the decision for me more informed, but not easier. We are taking your concerns very seriously. This change is fraught with anxiety and emotion. I am nervous too. Parents that want their kids back are just as nervous as you are. For our kids, we have to be a little bit bold in our reach. Their future deserves it. The hybrid model is not sustainable. It is just a matter of timing. The time will never be quote-unquote right. So many uncertainties and obstacles, if we sit back, plan it, and wait for the right time it will be June and then September and the virus will still be here. We need to break through these walls and obstacles. My advocacy is based on my belief by starting this process on February 25th is the right thing to do. If we vote this in tonight, we will be one of the first and few public schools in the State to break down that wall. This will not be easy. I ask for everyone's patience, understanding, and faith. We are going to take these bold steps together and we will get it right. It will take a village and we can do it.

Mrs. Corbo's Statement: I appreciate everyone's thoughts here today. I do not support the *Memorandum of Agreement* as written. This does not mean I do not want our children to return to school or increased in-person learning. I believe the compromises to come to an agreement with the union are not in the best interest of our students. As such I do not support this *Agreement* and I believe that management should exercise its non-delectable management rights to increase in-person education without an agreement of the union unless further compromises are made. The work the committee and administration have done to secure this *Agreement* was an immense effort. When I say the compromises made are not in the best interest of the students, that is my opinion about the consequences of the compromises. It is not a reflection on the Committee members, the motive of intent of the administration, or my fellow Committee members. My Committee members and the administrators care deeply about students. We have spent hundreds of hours on how to increase in-person education. Our teachers care deeply about students. My disagreement is with the management approach and is not a reflection on the intent or efforts of the parties involved. I have several concerns about this agreement which can be classified as compromising instructional integrity and student access to education for the sake of agreement with the union. This is not the first time I have raised these concerns. I voted no on both the spring and fall *Memorandums of Agreement*. Once again with this MOA, several provisions invoke disdained concerns. First not only is the phasing date later than we had agreed in our proposal, but the priority is also the opposite of the proposal which prioritized Juniors who are preparing for AP exams and SATs and Seniors whose high school year ends a month earlier than all other students. These students are now last. The start date of February 25th is a Thursday and meant to allow union membership Wednesday as a planning day to prepare for the increase. Not only is this significantly later than our proposed start date of February 8th, I strongly disagree with forgoing Monday and Tuesday (2-days of in-person education) for approximately 180 third and fourth graders so 17 teachers can have a

planning day immediately following 9 days of vacation. That is not acceptable and it is not in the best interest of our students. Second, section 6 of the proposed MOA eliminates the district's ability to provide zoom lessons and live streaming to students. Teachers may opt to provide this to students but the district cannot mandate that it be available even to students who are unable to attend for a lengthy period of time because of quarantine and medical absence. We have this technology available to us now. I understand the concerns of teachers with the difficulties of teaching on two platforms (in-person and on-line) but I believe that there is a compromise to be made here especially in the cases of extended medical leaves. We have this technology and I am not going to agree to limit a student's access to education and instruction when we should be using this technology to expand it. Third, there was a change to the draft of the agreement and an insertion of language that now states discussions regarding Wednesday in-person will not occur until late March or early April. We have repeatedly promised families that our decisions would be guided by science and data. Agreement to this provision means the next days of increasing in-person education will be guided by neither science nor data but by the union's timeframe. That is unacceptable. All of these things directly impact access to education and curriculum by pushing out two days of in-person education, restricting zoom access for children who cannot be present in the classroom, and the additions for Wednesdays in-person instruction. This is not negotiating money, benefits, or sick days. We are talking about the fundamental principles of education. These were never meant to be subjects of negotiation. I value compromise and harmony. I understand that we are far ahead of other communities when it comes to returning our students to school. By agreeing to these terms, we compromise access to education. We have the management authority to move forward without agreement. As difficult and uncomfortable as that may be, we owe it to our children to draw hard lines when issues of accessing curriculum and education are being discussed. We can justify this agreement a hundred different ways saying it only affects 180 and kids, it is only two days of learning, our nurses can use the extra time, kids probably will not be out for extended absences, and we can compensate for lack of zoom access with other asynchronous methods of instruction. Regardless of the justification, some things should not be compromised. Access to education and curriculum is one of them. This is not about teachers. We have wonderful teachers that go above and beyond every day for our students. This is not about the union. The union is doing its job and advocating for teachers. The union's job is to represent teachers but that is not my job. My job is to speak for students and families. That is why I cannot support this agreement and I urge the committee to reject it and move forward with the increased absence of union agreement.

### **Questions:**

Mr. Geary: Thank you for sharing your opinions. Everything is clear except for one thing. You mentioned phasing dates, are you suggesting we chose more aggressive phasing dates?

Mrs. Corbo: Yes, I would stick with the original proposal of February 8<sup>th</sup>. I understand that because we have delayed that may not be logistically possible. I would also prefer to see us stick with a proposal of prioritizing on February 8<sup>th</sup> the high school Juniors and Seniors. Having them go a week before vacation.

Mrs. Miller reminded the attendees that public comment will be moved to after the vote to approve the *Memorandum of Agreement* with the Hanover Teachers Association.

Mrs. Corbo requested the vote to wait and hear from members of the public and families?

Mrs. Miller isn't in agreement with having to wait. Requested other School Committee members to share their opinions.

Mr. Geary stated it is ratification. We could have done this in Executive Session but we did it in public session as a courtesy. This was verified by our legal department.

Mrs. Corbo does not dispute that as it is 100% correct and happy it is being held in public. Mrs. Corbo was just suggesting that even though we do not need to hear from parents and students before voting it might be important to hear as we decide to vote tonight.

Mr. Geary stated that he agrees with Mrs. Corbo but reminded Mrs. Corbo that an announcement was made on Monday evening and we took comments and questions via email for the past two days.

Mrs. Lynch comment that this is something we have all been working on for the past several months. Everyone was very careful in articulating their personal feelings during the past few minutes. There is nothing at this point that could be said that has not already been said and nothing will change my mind in supporting this. I understand that this was not what we originally propose; but feel that if we did not give a little bit, it could back either party into a corner and so it would not go anywhere. We knew that would possibly be a reality. We saw it in other communities with parents marching around schools holding up signs. We saw teachers doing the same thing. We did not want that in our community. The points that Mrs. Corbo brought up are valid. Interested in hearing what the families have to say, but as far as a vote, it will not change my mind.

Mr. Miraglia also noted that he is comfortable with the vote. He has read countless posts, emails, and everything on the chat. It has been very informative but it will not change his mind as he has enough information.

Mr. Geary is in agreement with that.

Mrs. Miller entertains a motion to approve the MOA as written

Motion moved by Geary to approve the *Memorandum of Agreement* with the Hanover Teachers Association as written. The motion was seconded by Lynch. The motion carried with a majority vote with opposition by Mrs. Corbo. MOA passes with the majority vote.

**Public Comment:** Mrs. Miller monitored the calls and allowed community members access and the ability to address the Committee. Below is a summary of their questions:

- Jake Faghan (10th-grade HS student): Commented that he didn't think this was the right time to send students back four days a week. He questioned when having more students in the building, how was the district going to keep everyone safe at lunches, in hallways, and even in classrooms. He believes that students should return four days, but after more time has been put into the planning. He stated that students are frustrated because they never had a chance to voice their opinions and asked for a revote after the Committee heard the public comments.
- Mr. Ferron stated: After reading a lot of the questions, many people in the survey results are looking forward to having the kids come back full-time. The issue we are stuck on is; What to do if the kids are quarantined? At the moment, the agreement we have with the Teachers Association is that live in-person is their priority and their focus. We are working on logistical issues of having more students in every building and our current plan will evolve. Please have a little bit of patience and give us time. Our teachers are going to rise to the challenge. As a parent looking at this through a different lens, I would have the same questions. We need to respect and understand the teachers and what they have had to do in the last year. Teaching to a group of students in-person and also trying to modify it to the kids at home is difficult and we have to give them time to prepare. Everyone wants to do what is best for the kids. We are moving forward carefully, slowly, and thoughtfully. Lots of questions in the chat about why we are moving forward with the rate of COVID infections going up? We have done in-depth research and consulted every possible public health official possible. We have taken the temperature of the community. Our public health and school health people say we're ready to go back. If we cannot do this safely and the pooled testing indicates that we have prevalent asymptomatic COVID in our schools, we will close it. If there is spread within schools and we are the cause, we will stop. I understand many do not agree with what I am saying and I understand. Please be assured, we are hearing your questions, especially the zoom-in-the-room question. We are concerned about



new strains of covid, about the vaccine roll-out, and about what the results in pooled testing might be if there is not enough participation. If we hit roadblocks, we will shift. If it turns out it is unsafe, we will stop.

- Mrs. St. Ives: Listening to Matt and seeing all the comments and knowing all the work that went into this plan, and listening to the student that just spoke and his perspective, we are being as collaborative as possible. When I reflect on this, I think about the team we have in place: administrators, the School Committee, teachers, students, parents, and community members. There has been a tremendous amount of work to get us where we are today and to move us forward and only possible through a collaborative process. The issue that is on the table is the zoom-in-the-room. People keep saying we have the technology and resources. This is the step when we have all the faith in our teachers and how much they are devoted to our students. This is the step that is moving us forward. It is a comprise to take a step forward and it's not definite. It is not something that we can't revisit at any point. For them to focus on the kids in front of them, this is a step that is moving our kids forward. Teachers are on board. Everyone here tonight whether you are for or against it has said that our teaching staff is dedicated to our students and people want what is best for students. We will listen to everyone so we can address all of the challenges. Our administrators have done a tremendous job of trying to balance listening to everyone and addressing challenges, while constantly adjusting logistics throughout the past year. This is not an ideal plan but it is something for us to work on and move forward.
- Kate Sullivan (Parent): I wanted to thank everyone for the time and effort in rolling out this new plan. What is challenging is that Mrs. Corbo asked for public comment and I appreciate the logistics behind that and you are agreeing that you would vote before the public comment. She stated that because this plan was just rolled out 48 hours ago and she didn't think the parents, general public, or students had adequate time to comment or express their concerns before the vote and thought they would be able to express concerns at the meeting before the vote. She voiced her concerns with sending students back four days, specifically students who are on Individualized Education Plan (IEP). She said that if those students are put in quarantine a plan is in place. She is hoping we are figuring out how to prioritize all student's education. and that we are not giving a little bit of not being able to close the achievement gap for the 500+ children on IEPs in our district. If my daughter was out for 5 days, just in services alone, she would miss 765 minutes of education. That is a significant amount of education for a child who needs to close the achievement gap. Hopefully, we figure out how to prioritize special education for these students. This has nothing to do with the amazing providers, DESE told everyone these students were a priority and that needs to continue.
- Mr. Ferron thanked Mrs. Sullivan for her advocacy and straightforward approach. Special education services are going to be provided. If it requires zoom, then it requires zoom. The services on the IEP will be met and are not affected by any part of this agreement.
- Mrs. Miller wanted to make it clear that the survey was sent out months ago about bringing your children back to school and the results were that people wanted their student back. We have been speaking about this for months and have taken many comments from parents and students. We have been openly asking for public comments for months. The State is pushing to get students back. This is why we developed a plan and why we are rolling it out. Kate, your questions about special ed services are all things we now need to address. Now that we have our framework and our plan to go back to school, this is where the work starts.
- Connor Jewson (Senior HS student): He reflected on previous comments that we are still in the red zone and that we will be careful, but you can only be so careful when you have that many students in a classroom or a whole school at the same time. He stated his concerns with pooled testing and as he understands it, an average is used to determine negative or positive. The safety of students in the school should be prioritized over a student's willingness to take the test. The idea of not having zoom available is backward progress. We have spent all this time developing the system that keeps students at home and



learning at the same time. If the people making these decisions are prioritizing the students, then the students should have had a say in going back.

- Mrs. Smith thanked Connor for his question. Appreciate the students who are speaking tonight. Mrs. Smith wanted to clarify that when we put 10 samples in the pool if any of them have COVID-19 on the swab that is a positive result. It is not an average. We will then have all of those people tested individually and we will find out which one(s) are positive. The pool test is a PCR test. It is the gold standard test and considered highly reliable.
- Emerence Morales Donnell (Senior HS student): She also stated that students should have had a chance to voice their concerns before the vote. Commented that she is not comfortable with being three feet apart from other students. and does not feel comfortable attending a school where students are not careful enough. She doesn't want to drop classes her senior year and attend virtual school when she has come so far in her education. She stated that just because we have improving numbers does not mean our situation has completely improved. We cannot be a pioneer in going back full time. A student or family member dying is not an obstacle. It is dangerous for our teachers, staff, and family members. Students feel it is important to continue with their education safely. Our teachers work very hard and we understand that. Students have a voice. We are loud, we are clear, and we are here. We deserved to be listened to. Thank you.
- Emma Massey (Senior HS student): She stated that she is on a 504 plan and like other students with those accommodations in place were allowed to be a member of the green cohort which was four days of in-person learning before this announcement. This was her first opportunity to be able to speak her opinion on this announcement. Yes, this plan has been in the works for months and months but no feedback was asked from the students. It is not acceptable that students were not able to speak before the vote took place. This is not in the best interest of the students which is the most crucial part of this transition. How can we allow learning to take place at the same level that it once did while remaining safe? She believes the existence of a zoom option is crucial to maintain the level of safety guidelines that have existed before this announcement that has allowed us to be in the position we are in now. Thank you for allowing me to speak and for the hard work and determination that has been put into this decision.
- Tracy Coughlin (Parent): Commented that everyone thinks teachers play a vital role in our students. If there is any way we can help our teachers to do their job so that they can help the kids she is on board and thrilled they are going back in-person more. She recognized that people believe that three feet is too close and although three feet is not ideal, it has been working in other districts since September and it can work here. She spoke about how other schools are teaching their students in class and zooming at the same time Citing Hingham Middle School. Teachers were concerned about implementing it, and there were some issues, but it is working well now. They are teaching the kids in front of them while the kids at home are doing the same lesson. Although it would be a learning curve for the Hanover teachers, we should strive for it. It is not fair to the kids that are quarantined. Teachers are so valuable and we need to have students in front of them as much as possible. The School Committee, administration, and teacher can play a vital role in helping all of these students coming back. Thank you.
- Ben Johnson (Parent of 4): Commented that he noticed with his kids and their friends that their mental and physical state has been diminished. He knows a lot of people that are fully on board with what you guys are doing to get these kids back to school and they appreciate all the time and effort put into it. This is a bold step. He wanted the Committee to hear from people like himself that appreciate this. Thank you.
- Jillian Farrell (HS student): Thank you all for allowing students to get to go in four days a week. She commented that when she is in the two days, she is learning a lot more than when on zoom. It will be very helpful to a lot of students who have a hard time learning on zoom.
- Matt Tocchio (Parent): Asked what the busing plan is moving forward as he has some confusion about it?
- Dr. Raab explained that the overall plan to have students move into four days a week. Unfortunately, we are still under the same bussing restriction with the State and that is we are only allowed one student per

seat unless with a sibling(s). If siblings are on the bus together, they will sit together to maximize the number of seats on the bus. There is not an opportunity to add busses. If restrictions are eased, we will take advantage of that. If you are accustomed to having your child take the bus for two days, on the alternate days we are asking the parent to provide transportation which is going to be a challenge not only for bus transportation but for any parent doing pick up and drop off. We will be working with the Hanover Police Department to try to make sure it is more efficient but we are hoping to see modified guidelines for the buses. The Governor and Commissioner of Education have been telling us to get the kids back to schools now, they need to help us with transportation, testing programs, direction, and guidance.

- Joe DaCosta (Parent of 4 kids): Thanked the administrators, staff, teachers, and the School Committee. The last ten months have been challenging for everybody. But having been able to keep our kids is a testament to all of you and all your hard work. He has talked to a lot of people who are all for getting the kids back in school. He has seen how excited his kids are when they see friends and when they go to school for two days. We all have been missing out on that human interaction. He believes this process will be safe if not safer. The better situation for our kids is to be in school in front of their teachers. He stated he is fully supportive of this and knows many other parents that are as well.

Mrs. Miller will get the questions printed out and emailed to the committee. The committee will work to address those questions. If you have any questions, you can reach out to your building administrator, Mr. Ferron, Mrs. Smith, and any of the school committee members with any further questions you want to be answered.

#### **Report of Finance Department presented by Dr. Raab:**

##### FY '21 Budget Update/FY '22 Budget Update:

Dr. Raab is pleased to report that nothing has changed since the January 20th School Committee meeting. If you attended the Town Manager's presentation on Monday night at the Board of Selectman meeting, he presented our budget at the 5.7% increase that we have been requesting. We have also had in the annual town meeting an additional \$350,000 earmarked for our special education reserved fund. That will help us next year if we have unanticipated special education needs. Thank you, Joe Colangelo, the Town Manager, and everyone we worked with to get this budget to where it is. We will be presenting the School Department budget on March 17<sup>th</sup> to the Advisory Committee.

**Questions:** None

**Report of Teaching and Learning by Mrs. St Ives:** No report at this time

#### **Action Items:**

#### **HHS Dominican Republic Field Trip Postponement**

Mr. Paquette is speaking on behalf of science teacher Shayle Emerson who had scheduled a previous trip to the Dominican Republic. It was already scheduled and approved by the Committee. It was scheduled for this February break and for obvious reasons will not be taking place. We are seeking the Committee's approval to move it to February 14<sup>th</sup> through February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022. All of the other elements of the trip remain the same.

#### **Questions:**

Mrs. Lynch: Were there any current seniors on the trip?

Mr. Paquette: There are no seniors on this trip. It will not impact any students to postpone the trip. There are four or five that are going to roll over with it.

Motion entertained by Mrs. Miller to postpone the HHS Dominican Republic Field Trip previously approve to February 14<sup>th</sup> through February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022. The motion was moved by Lynch and seconded by Geary. The vote carried unanimously.

The next School Committee meeting is scheduled for February 24, 2021. Expected agenda items will be: FY '21 Budget Update, FY '22 Budget Update, COVID Health Update, High School achievement testing update.

Motion by Lynch to adjourn the open session at 8:59 PM. The motion was seconded by Geary. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted by:

*Tahnee Warner*

Tahnee Warner  
Executive Assistant/ Recording Secretary