

Hanover School Committee Meeting Minutes
April 14, 2021
Virtual Meeting
7:00 PM

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

Also Present: Matthew Ferron, Thomas Raab, Debbie St. Ives, Patricia Smith, Matthew Paquette, Daniel Birolini, Jane DeGrenier, Michael Oates, Matthew Plummer, Kelly Stukenborg, Andrea Sheehan, Andrea Hurley

Call to Order: Meeting was called to order at 7:02 PM by Mrs. Miller.

Mrs. Miller would like to thank Kelly Lawrence and her team for the School Committee's new Hanover Hawk gear. Coming to the school store soon!

Public Comment: None

Announcement: Our meetings going forward will be hybrid starting May 12, 2021.

Approval of Minutes:

March 24, 2021: Motion entertained by Mrs. Miller to approve the March 24, 2021 *School Committee Minutes* as written. The motion was moved by Mrs. Lynch and seconded by Mr. Geary. The motion carried unanimously.

Report of the Superintendent presented by Mr. Ferron:

Appointment of Director of Student Services: We have an opportunity to appoint a Director of Student Services as I am pleased to recommend Mr. Michael Oates for appointment to this position. This is a critical leadership position for our district, and I am very confident that Mr. Oates has the administrative and classroom experience, academic credentials, leadership ability, and interpersonal attributes that make him an excellent candidate for this role.

Mr. Oates knows our students and their families, he has built strong relationships with our staff at all levels, and he is loyal and committed to our school community. In his career, Mr. Oates has worked as a leader in multiple districts with diverse populations and service needs – many that fit perfectly with this role. He has been directly involved in all of our literacy work, specialized programming for students with Autism, the development of the Stars programming at Cedar, and he is the district trainer on de-escalation techniques. Mr. Oates earned a Master's Degree in Special Education, he has worked as an inclusion teacher, and he has over twelve years of experience as a principal who was actively involved in special education, English Language Learners, counseling services, health/wellness, and budgetary issues.

This is an incredibly important role in our school system, and it is very difficult to find the right candidate. As we began the search process, it quickly became apparent that the best candidate for Hanover right now is already on our team and ready to accept this new challenge. Mr. Oates will begin his new assignment over the summer, and I will be evaluating our options for a succession plan at Cedar School in the weeks ahead. Please join me in congratulating Mr. Oates on his new position.

Questions/Comments:

Mrs. Miller is thrilled that we had an internal candidate that is so strong and willing to put his hat into the field for this. She looks forward in seeing what Mr. Oates will do and has full confidence in his ability to take this position in ways we never expected.

Mrs. Corbo: Could Mr. Ferron talk about the public search process that was made for this position?

Mr. Ferron: We started with a traditional job search by posting in School Spring and Indeed. We screened about 30 resumes. We also reached out to every superintendent on the South Shore, folks at the North River Collaborative, and M.A.S.S. asking if they knew of any candidates who they may have recently interviewed or someone in their District looking to advance with zero feedback. They all said the same thing that if you have an internal candidate that you believe in then it is worth the investment. In talking with the Director at the North River Collaborative, he said in the 10 School Districts that make up the North River Collaborative and there has is only one Special Education Director who has been around for more than 3 years. We then started gathering an internal group of teachers and administrators to do a screening process alongside Mrs. St. Ives and Mr. Ferron. A meeting was arranged with SEPAC to discuss attributes and all the things we wanted in a candidate. It became pretty evident early on that we had an opportunity with an internal candidate. Mr. Oates expressed interest. Mrs. St. Ives and Mr. Ferron sat down with Mr. Oates and had a real conversation asking if this is something he really wanted to do as they are very interested in him for this role. An opportunity presented itself and we had to act accordingly.

Mrs. Corbo: She has concerns with the selection process. Her concerns have no reflection on Mr. Oates as a principal and school leader. Mr. Oates makes an excellent principal and school leader. Every interaction with him has been positive and he is held in very high esteem. She had expressed her feelings with Mr. Ferron, Mrs. Miller and had a personal conversation with Mr. Oates on how this process went and how it impacts her ability to support this appointment. This position is extremely important in our district and in her opinion, it is one of the top four and can impact student learning and the financial obligations of our district. In the past, the process has been very transparent, thorough, and we had a collaborative hiring process. It has involved stakeholders such as SEPAC and members of this Committee. We had a multi-stage hiring process and there has always been a search committee utilized. The position was posted for about ten days in mid-March but she does not recall seeing a copy of the posting or of the Committee being informed that the position was posted. She does not believe the search met the level of thoroughness that we need for this position. As a district, we have a duty to provide and ensure that the very best candidate is hired for this position and that may be Mr. Oates. As stewards of a 31.5 million dollar budget for a public organization funded with taxpayer dollars, we should ensure this position is filled with the most qualified candidate. An internal appointment is different than we have had in the past, however, when promoting someone internally it is even more important to complete a thorough search process to dispel any notions that other factors may have influenced the appointment other than credentials. It has been requested that Mr. Oates be appointed to an interim position while the position is reposted and a search committee is convened. This would be helpful now while the job pool is more robust. This would be in the best interest of our students and is no reflection on Mr. Oates. We need a public thorough and collaborative process to hire for this position.

Mrs. Miller: Dr. Raab sends the posting via email to the School Committee. Instructed Mrs. Corbo to reach out to Dr. Raab to make sure she is on the email list. In checking with the attorney, it is within Mr. Ferron's purview to hire this position and the School Committee does not have to approve it. It is a bonus for the School Committee to approve it. It is not a required public process.

Mrs. Lynch: A Director of Special Education is the one position in the district that is the most difficult to find. It is a very demanding role. It is necessary to look for a candidate that has the expertise and the knowledge of the unique laws of special education and different programs going on. Ideally, you want someone knowledgeable of the community values, the approach the community takes, and what the community issues are regarding Special Education. What a wonderful opportunity that we have someone in our community that has proven skills in leadership. Look what he has done at Cedar that has certainly changed the community. If we were questioning his skills, knowledge, and commitment only then could I ever see us going the interim route. Thank you, Mr. Oates, for your willingness to take on this challenge and I am invested in you.

Mr. Miraglia: When I first learned about this, I was just as surprised as everyone else but then I thought this makes a lot of sense. We have a lot of work to do and catch up on. We have a lot of people that are in that band where they have to catch up. It needs a lot of work and coordination. This area is where a lot of innovation is needed and we need someone that can see where the horizon is. I think Mr. Oates is up for the job and I am looking forward to working with him.

Mr. Geary: Leadership and innovation are critical to this position but the intimate knowledge of our students and families is critical. In conversations with SEPAC, a lot of the conversation recently has been about early intervention and what are we doing to identify these students at the Pre-K, K, and first-grade level which Mr. Oates has successfully achieved. If you speak to the SEPAC members, they would validate that Mr. Oates is deeply involved in that early intervention process. He has six years of experience now and he has this forward scope into our elementary and middle school students that he has had. He knows these families and children. He has built the foundation and has a relationship with these families. That bandwidth is critical as well as leadership and innovation. An outside person regardless of their skill set has a learning curve that could take years to build in our district. Mr. Oates, I welcome you to the position and am thrilled for you to be there. There are high expectations and there is no doubt that you will be able to achieve them.

Mr. Birolini: This is a super important position to fill. In agreement that this is one of the top four positions in the district and the toughest to fill. He walks into a team already and I have the utmost confidence in what he can do. This is a position that you recruit. This feels good, it feels right, and I am at ease because it is the most challenging position to fill.

Dr. Raab: Mr. Oates is absolutely ready for this and very excited he will be joining the team. His knowledge of special education and understanding of the children's needs from ages three years and up. Always appreciated that he works hard with parents and staff not only to create programs, but also to take care of the needs of the students.

Ms. Adriana Mason commented that she has been immersed in special education in Hanover for the last seven years from working with different schools and leaders in the district to develop new programs. Trying to always cultivate a relationship with the Special Education Director. From a parent's perspective, in nine years we have had five Special Education Directors. We could go through a laborious process to hire this position but historically it has not yielded someone who has come in from the outside and stayed with us for the long haul. Mr. Oates seems to be here for the long haul and more than qualified. The morale is down and concerns are high. We do not have the time to have someone come into our district green and build relationships. Mr. Oates can start right from the start. We are so fortunate and this is such a unique opportunity. I support this appointment.

Motion entertained by Mrs. Miller to approve the appointment of Michael Oates as Director of Student Services. The motion was moved by Lynch and seconded by Geary. The motion carried with a majority vote with opposition by Mrs. Corbo. Appointment of Michael Oates as Director of Student Services passes with the majority vote.

Mr. Oates' Statement: First and foremost, I want to thank members, of the Hanover School Committee, Superintendent Ferron, Assistant Superintendent St. Ives, and Assistant Superintendent Raab. I am honored to be selected the next Director of Student Services. Your faith in my abilities and your trust that I will put the students of Hanover's needs above all else is greatly appreciated. It is an honor and I am truly blessed.

Serving as principal at Cedar these past 7 years has been a dream come true. The students, the staff, and the families have been nothing short of amazing. We are all so fortunate to be here in Hanover, but it is extra special when you get to work with our youngest children, our Super Friends here at the Cedar School. Given the age and needs of the students, their success hinges upon the relationships between the school and families. The Cedar community operates as a team, and as a result, the students thrive.

I fully intend to bring this same team approach to the role of Director of Student Services. I have plenty to learn as I take on this new assignment (different budget, grants, circuit breaker, out-of-district placement), but I am not coming into this role starting from scratch in terms of relationships with students, families, and staff. My youngest Cedar friends are three years old and my oldest Cedar students will be entering their junior year at the High School in September. Being a smaller district, I have been able to work closely with the administrative teams at all levels and I have been lucky enough to get to know many of the staff members in the other schools as well. Like the students, I have been able to build relationships with so many of the wonderful Hanover families as they have started their journey through our schools. I cannot wait to reconnect with my former students and their families. Again, like with any new assignment, there is work to do to prepare for this opportunity, but I do feel like I will hit the ground running in terms of the critical relationships with students, staff, and families.

Ten years ago, I obtained my superintendent/assistant superintendent license with the hopes that someday I would get the opportunity to transition to a central office position. At the time, I had aspired to sit where Mr. Ferron, Dr. Raab, or Mrs. St. Ives are sitting, but the last 7 years here in Hanover have caused me to shift my focus a bit. Working here with students with complex learning disabilities, the staff that supports them, and teaming up with families who are brand new to special education – often confused about how we provide instruction and support and scared about what lies ahead for their child. These are the experiences that have led me to aspire to a central office Student Services position. At around the same time that I started here at Cedar one of my children was diagnosed with a learning disability and as a result, I have gained unique insight into the parent and child at-home special education experience. The triumphs and the struggles associated with my son's journey has also inspired me to want to take on a leadership position in special education.

At the building level, I have been able to work with a talented staff to establish and enhance substantially separate classrooms and programs, to design models and schedules to provide targeted intervention, to implement curriculum, to train staff, and to provide supports for families.

I am looking forward to working on these same endeavors and more, with the talented staff at all four buildings. I cannot wait to get started! Having said that, of course, I remain committed to the Cedar community. Our team – the students, teachers, and parents have done such an amazing job this year.

We have turned each challenge into an opportunity. Despite everything going on in the world outside our building, our Super Friends have enjoyed a very typical and wonderful school year. (who would have ever thought the word typical could have such a positive meaning), but in this case, it does. I am just so proud of the Cedar team and I remain committed to them until the end of June.

As with any new assignment, I have work to do to prepare, but I do believe my knowledge of the district, both our goals and objectives, and the students, staff, and families across the four schools provides us with the opportunity to be successful right away. I am truly grateful and honored by your faith in me. Thank you!

COVID Health Update-Mrs. Patricia Smith: Over the past two weeks, we have seen a steady stream of new cases of COVID-19 among our students and no new cases among our staff. Overall, the trend is relatively flat. The numbers of students under quarantine are higher than in previous months due to the 6' distancing requirement for contact tracing however, upon testing, we continue to see no or little spread in the classroom. New cases and trends are updated daily on the Hanover Public Schools COVID-19 Dashboard.

As you know, Hanover High School was remote for the past two days as we worked through a series of positive cases at the high school. For 2 weeks, the health services department identified 6 positive COVID-19 cases that had connections to several athletic programs and events outside of school. According to our protocol, we consulted the state epidemiologist, the department of elementary and secondary education, and the board of health. The decision was made to have the high school pivot to remote learning until the health services department could conduct additional testing and contact tracing. We tested, or have

scheduled to test over 100 students this week and at this time. We feel we have quarantined all known contacts. After discussions today with our state and local consultants, we are prepared to resume in-person learning beginning tomorrow. The overall numbers of cases in the district are not any higher than they have been. But this is an example of how circumstance and context dictate our course of action as opposed to numbers alone.

Over the initial 6 weeks of pooled testing, we have completed over 1,000 pools involving over 7500 individual tests and as a result, identified 15 asymptomatic COVID-19 cases, quarantined 176 students or staff, and from those quarantined we identified 1 school-based positive case, 6 household positive cases, and 1 case from an outside activity. We met with DESE yesterday to review the protocol, and we are very happy to know that pooled testing will be funded through the end of the school year. We encourage all of our families to consent to pooled testing. We feel this is a very useful tool to isolate any asymptomatic positive cases, and it is very reassuring to know that 99% of students and staff tested negative for COVID-19 week after week.

Mrs. Miller thanked all the nurses at the individual buildings for all their work and making those uncomfortable phone calls to put kids on quarantine. They hate making them as much as you hate getting the calls. The nurses are just following the protocol that the State has laid out. If you have any concerns or are feeling a little bit angry, please reach out to Mrs. Smith or Mr. Ferron.

Mr. Ferron: We continue to navigate the close contact quarantine issues inside the classroom. We cannot control what is going on outside of school. The commissioner told 500 superintendents on a call today that Hanover is leading the way! We are leading this work to try to reduce the necessity of quarantine for students who are three to six feet away in the classroom. We are not seeing spread in school. We are doing everything we can and we are recognized in the community. We are not perfect but we are going to try and finish this year off super strong!

Mrs. Miller added that any parents that want to advocate regarding reducing this issue please reach out to the Governor and DESE and talk about how the quarantines are affecting your families.

Questions:

Mr. Miraglia: When you have a positive case in class and you are drawing a six-foot circle and quarantining those students, is the evidence showing that none of these students in quarantine are getting COVID?

Mrs. Smith: That is correct. There may have been one and three that we have not been able to connect outside of school. We are talking about thousands of tests. Particularly in pool testing, it is incredible the data that we have that shows all of these thousands of people that were tested, that we are not catching additional positive cases from that group. It is mostly from household spread, friend groups, or sports teams. Credit goes to the school nurses who are keeping meticulous data.

HPTA Fun Run-Andrea Sheehan: HPTA is requesting the Fun Run Fundraiser be approved. Mrs. Sheehan was elected as the President of the HPTA in late January 2020. Despite the challenges of the past year, it has also been a year of achievement for the PTA. Grateful for the amazing leadership of the School Committee and School Administration. Our teachers have been great and the kids have shown resilience. The PTA has been active in using resources carefully and in a way that aligned with our school leadership needs and requirements. Thank you to Dr. Raab who has been advising the PTA along the way. The PTA has invested in the mascot costumes, purchased books for Center School for the Read Across America Program, books were purchased for every student at Cedar School for the One Book One School Reading Program, supplied prizes at the Halloween Bingo at Center School, Hot Chocolate and Cookie Bar at all the schools, an inspirational storyteller at the Middle School, back to school lunches for all staff and administrators, utility carts for Cedar School transporting art and music equipment, fun recess bags were put together for Center School, funds put aside for field day, funds have been allocated for end of year activities for grades 1, 4, 8, and 12 students as they move on through the school system, and so much more. Despite strict and necessary protocols, the PTA has made a difference. Resources and funds have been used very carefully. We would like the School Committee to support our request for the Fun Run Fundraiser for next February 2022. Thank you for allowing me to speak this evening.

Mrs. Miller noted that she appreciates the PTA for filling out the form correctly and to come before the School Committee and ask for approval. This fundraiser raises a lot of money. We have a policy that people must fill out the form and come before the School Committee. The money raised is used for all schools in the district.

Questions:

Mrs. Lynch: We are grateful for all you have done especially this year particularly for teacher appreciation lunches and the numerous fundraisers you had done. As I watched the Principals listening to you, they were all clapping and smiling because they know personally how much of an impact it has. The dilemma I have is the question of the Fun Run and if it disrupts the school day. Is it interfering with the educational process in the buildings? I need reassurance tonight from the Principals.

Mrs. Miller: We never want a fundraiser to feel pressured for the kids to participate. When this fundraiser first began, we bought the platinum package and it came with lots of things and people. It has since been remedied.

Mr. Oates: From the younger student's perspective, it is not a distraction. The Fun Run was very receptive to our feedback and what our concerns were especially after the first one. It was super successful but there was an element that was a little more distracting than we had hoped. Since then, there are no disruptions at all. It is entertainment during lunch. The themes are very positive and echoing the things we are trying to teach the students. The run itself although a big event, it is minimal for a classroom. It is like going to a specialist class and they are getting physical fitness and exercise. Even some students were running on their own to prepare for it.

Mrs. DeGrenier: Echo's everything that Mr. Oates said. We geared everything to arrival and dismissal so a lot of interaction between the Fun Run staff and students. The kids enjoyed that. The character program when with our theme and ran during lunches. They had a meter board that let the children see how much the school was raising, as we hit those targets, they earned a free recess. We would be doing that anyway. We just made sure we choose things that hit their meter board that we would be doing anyway.

Mrs. Corbo wanted to thank the PTA for your devotion to enriching our student's experiences at school. Without your efforts, many of the activities that our kids look forward to would not be occurring. Your volunteers give generously of their time. Very grateful.

Motion by Lynch to approve the HPTA Fun Run for February 28, 2022 as presented. The motion was seconded by Geary. The motion carried unanimously.

Sylvester School Town Meeting Article: Moved to a later time as there is nothing new to discuss.

Report of Finance Department presented by Dr. Raab:

FY '22 Budget Approval: Last week Mr. Ferron and I presented the School Department budget and Thomas Nee and I presented the Technology Budget to the Advisory Committee. I am confident that they have a comprehensive understanding of both budgets. They expressed a lot of support for the hard work that has been done by the School Committee, Information Technology Study Committee, the Principals, and all the hard work we have done on putting together a comprehensive budget for next year. The town meeting is on May 3rd. Right now, we have been given every indication that the Advisory Committee will be supporting our 1.7 million dollar increase we have put forward. Yesterday at a legal conference for MASBO, they had mentioned the House Ways and Means Committee is considering increases to Chapter 70 funding beyond the Governor's proposal. We do not know how much that is going to be, but it is certainly going in the right direction. They are also considering fully funding circuit breaker, not only at the 75% we are enjoying this year but also to include a percentage of transportation reimbursement for Special Education.

Questions: None

Donations: A donation of \$5,000 was received from Mass Cultural Council to support a historical society visit to our 3rd grades at Center School Members will be visiting to present them with history lessons and a direct residency grant.

Questions: None

Motion by Lynch to approve the \$5,000 donation from the Mass Cultural Council. The motion was seconded by Geary. The motion carried unanimously.

Report of Teaching and Learning:

Saturday School Update-presented by Mrs. St. Ives and Ms. Andrea Hurley:

Mrs. St. Ives: We have had a Saturday program going on for the past several weeks. It was a grant-funded program and we received \$11,730. There were some strict guidelines. The grant had to be conducted either on the weekend or during vacation. The goal was small group-focused intervention in the area of math and reading. Andrea Hurley from Hanover Middle School was the director of the program for us.

Ms. Andrea Hurley: Our instructional support team got together and worked on some of the data we received each year. We tried to identify students that could use a little help or had areas of weakness that existed due to our COVID shutdown. We looked at students doing pretty well but a little bit of a slip and is there any way that we could fill in some of these gaps. We are running on Saturday mornings at the high school. We started with reading. We ended up with 37 students participating in grades two thru eight. In the younger grades, we focused on phonics & vocabulary. At the higher grades, we focused on vocabulary and reading comprehension. We had one Hanover teacher apply and everyone else was from our neighboring districts with a ton of enthusiasm. They had access to any reports they needed. If they needed anything else, they could reach out. Pam Manning came and helped set up all the technology. Dr. Raab taught her how to alarm the building. Mr. Plummer gave access to get places, access to whiteboards, and markers. Everyone jumped in and helped. The reading program ended last week after 7 weeks. Each class was an hour and a half. The feedback was great from the parents! Before Easter, we started the math so it has only been two weeks. We did the same process as the reading so that we had good comprehensive lists. This program ends on May 22nd and is the same format of an hour and a half on Saturdays.

Questions/Comments:

Mrs. Miller: Is it for students on IEP's or for any student that needs help?

Ms. Hurley: No one was excluded.

Mrs. Miller: Where was the grant from?

Mrs. St. Ives: It is from the Department of Education.

They put it out in late summer and we went for it. Initially, it was tough for staff. We went back and forth on how to staff it. We extended it out and got the word out so we could get the 7 instructors we needed. It has been an amazing opportunity. Ms. Hurley worked hard, getting the declines and following up with students.

Mr. Miraglia: Looking forward to seeing more creativity in catching these kids up. Give these kids a chance to catch up.

Mrs. Lynch: Ms. Hurley, how did you get them to come on Saturdays?

Mrs. Hurley: We asked parents to sign up.

There was a lot of back and forth because of sports and other conflicts. Sometimes they left a few minutes early. Parents were grateful. Some were upfront to say they could not commit right now. We kept going at it. We made it quick and fun. Every teacher would come in with a box of stuff so that they kept it super engaging.

Mrs. Lynch: Mrs. St. Ives, did you write this grant?

Mrs. St. Ives: Yes, with help from ISP and Mr. Guyette. Mr. Guyette had seen it over the summer and we knew we wanted to do it. We are trying to be as creative as possible with our Title 1 funding. We received a Title 1 grant every year. The way things worked out; we had some money we were able to pull so we will be running a similar program for the middle school starting in the first week of May. This one we will be running right after or before school depending on the staff we can solicit and attach it to the school day so that it is easier for families. We are hoping to have the same type of focus and hit another layer of students. Once we look at funding, we are hoping to do it for 8 weeks. We are trying to be as creative as we can for this small group of intensely focused interactions. Mr. Birolini will be sending information out once he recruits staff.

Mrs. Corbo: Is this grant renewable? Love the idea of having a program providing support if they do not fall into the IEP program.

Mrs. St. Ives: Not at this time but we will keep watching.

Action Items: None

The next School Committee meeting is scheduled for April 28, 2021. Expected agenda items will be COVID Health Update, Fiscal FY '22 budget.

Motion by Lynch to adjourn the open session at 8:29 PM. The motion was seconded by Geary. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Tahnee Warner

Tahnee Warner
Executive Assistant/ Recording Secretary