

Hanover School Committee Meeting Minutes
August 26, 2021
Hybrid Meeting
Hanover High School
6:00 PM

Present: Mrs. Leah Miller, Mr. Pete Miraglia, Mrs. Ruth Lynch, Mrs. Libby Corbo, and Mrs. Ryan Hall

Also Present: Matthew Ferron, Debbie St. Ives, Tom Raab, Patricia Smith, Michael Oates, Daniel Birolini, Jane DeGrenier, Garry Pelletier, Matthew Mattos, Matthew Plummer, Kelly Lawrence, Kelly Stukenborg, Joel Barrett, Russ Wilson,

Call to Order: Meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM by Mrs. Miller.

Public Comment: None

Approval of Minutes:

June 9, 2021: Motion entertained by Mrs. Miller to approve the June 9, 2021; *School Committee Minutes* as written. The motion was moved by Mr. Miraglia and seconded by Mrs. Lynch. The motion carried unanimously.

June 18, 2021: Motion entertained by Mrs. Miller to approve the June 18, 2021; *School Committee Minutes* as written. The motion was moved by Mr. Miraglia and seconded by Mrs. Lynch. The motion carried unanimously.

June 23, 2021: Motion entertained by Mrs. Miller to approve the June 23, 2021; *School Committee Minutes* as written. The motion was moved by Mr. Miraglia and seconded by Mrs. Lynch. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Ferron will like to “thank Dr. Tom Raab for his years of service at the Hanover Public Schools. Dr. Raab will be the new Stoughton Public Schools Superintendent beginning in October. The admiration and appreciation for all Dr. Raab have done for the students in this community. Our community is stronger and more respected because of the decisions and work done by Dr. Raab. We are proud and excited for him.”

Report of the Superintendent presented by Mr. Ferron:

Introduction of New Administration:

Mr. Ferron announced the new administration for the 2021-2022 school year.

Mr. Michael Oates moved up to the Director of Student Service. This move left an opening in our leadership team at the Cedar School, and we have filled that opening with Mr. Garry Pelletier. He will be the interim Principal for this school year. Mr. Pelletier retired a few years ago and now and then comes out of retirement for situations like this. Many of us have worked with Mr. Pelletier in the past. We are grateful he is here. We welcome Mr. Matthew Mattos. Mr. Mattos will be our new high school Principal and was the Principal at the Taunton High School for the past 16 years. He has a distinguished career as an educator and leader.

Mr. Oates welcomed the new administrator Dr. Kim Stoloski. Dr. Stoloski will be the Special Education Administrator at the Cedar School. She comes to us with a lot of experience in Special Education. We are thrilled to have Dr. Stoloski join our team.

We are excited about these new additions to our Hanover Public Schools and look forward to an incredible year.

Presentation on Opening of Schools/DESE Guidance: Presented by Mr. Ferron and Mrs. Smith. Mr. Ferron and Mrs. Smith presented the Fall 2021 DPH/DESE Reopening Guidance information. This presentation can be found in its entirety by clicking [here](#) or by going to the Hanover Public Schools Website. All of the DESE Updates & Guidance, Medical Mask Waiver Forms, and Pool Testing update have been posted on the Hanover Public Schools [Fall Opening 2021 page](#).

Questions/Comments:

Mrs. Miller: When you get tested through the MIH program, if you are negative, you will get an email, and if you are positive, you will need to wait to get a phone call?

Mrs. Smith: Yes, that is correct. If the test did not process correctly, was inconclusive, or tests positive, you will get a phone call from the school nurse or the Hanover Visiting Nurse Association. If you do not get an email, the email might have gone to spam, or it got blocked. If you do not receive a result, call the VNA or your school nurse.

Mrs. Corbo: About what time can parents expect to get the call?

Mrs. Smith: During the school week, the call will come in no later than 10:00 AM and on the weekends by 11:00 AM.

Mr. Miraglia: With the “Test and Stay”, how does quarantine work if you have close contact outside of school like sports?

Mrs. Smith: The most recent guidance we received was that the “Test and Stay” is only for school-based close contact. At this time, it would include school sports and classrooms but not household, friends, or outside club sport.

Mrs. Corbo: Could you share with the parents what is being done now with the vaccination status of a student and the use of MIIS?

Mrs. Smith: We are not actively mining or documenting COVID vaccine status in Massachusetts. As of right now, we have not done any additional looking at the MIIS data. There were questions from other districts about the usefulness of the MIIS and these were given to the Department of Public Health legal department to get clarity on how this information should be used. Their response was: *“School health professionals who are authorized users of the MIIS can check MIIS to confirm adequate up-to-date immunizations, avoid unnecessary immunizations, control disease outbreaks or as otherwise needed to confirm compliance with immunization requirements. Authorized school health professionals may check the COVID-19 vaccination status of any individual in MIIS for those purposes regardless of whether vaccines are mandated.”* The information can be used by authorized school professionals for the purpose of disease outbreak management. The only reason to mine it in Massachusetts is to figure out what percentage of the schools are vaccinated. As of right now, we do not know that percentage. We are on a need to know basis with the use of the MIIS data. After this meeting, we will be sending a comprehensive letter to community that will outline a lot of this information and we will include clear information on MIIS. You can send a letter to your pediatrician or school nurse to opt out of the MIIA and system then no one can see your immunization records.

Mrs. Corbo: Has the updated mask exemption forms been uploaded to the opening page on our website yet?

Mr. Ferron: Yes, the form has been updated and uploaded on the Hanover Public Schools website.

Mrs. Corbo: Have mask breaks changed since last year?

Mrs. Smith: Yes, mask breaks may occur throughout the day. If feasible, mask breaks should occur when the windows are open or students are outdoors. As a reminder, meals and outdoor recess provide built-in mask breaks for students and staff. This is less formalized. School Principals should make a plan that is appropriate for their age groups in their buildings, but there is a little more flexibility on where and how those mask breaks can occur.

Mrs. Hall: Do we have regulations or expectations at each building that will be shared with families and teachers as to when the mask breaks can happen or how many can happen?

Mr. Ferron: These will look different in each school. Principals from each building are here and will plan this. We are going to follow the DESE guidance but we are going to be flexible where we can.

Mrs. Corbo: Does the School Committee have a role to ensure the children have mask breaks and when?

Mr. Ferron: As a board, you can come up with a policy that would require that: but we are confident that each building administrator will come up with a reasonable plan and will communicate it with parents.

Mr. Ferron wanted to discuss some of the frequently asked questions he has received the last few days. What is going to happen if my kid does not wear a mask? We do not want to get into a situation where there are disciplinary consequences for something that is beyond our control. DESE says masks have to be worn. If they come to school, they have to wear a mask unless they have a medical exemption. We will not fight with the doctors if an exemption comes in. The administrators will work with this.

Mrs. Hall: Who can provide the mask medical exemptions?

Mrs. Smith: A licensed health care provider for example a physician, nurse practitioner, and physician assistant.

Mrs. Corbo: This guidance came out very close to the start of the school year. Can we offer a grace period to get this exemption?

Mrs. Smith: The guidance or the mandate is effective immediately as of August 25th. We do not have a grace period. If there is an issue and the child cannot wear a mask and if they had a waiver from the previous year, we will honor a waiver from the previous year. If they cannot get a waiver, call your school nurse and we will work it out. We do have a school physician that we can call upon if a student has no access to a health care provider in a timely manner.

Mrs. Lynch: Can you give us an estimate of how many exemptions there were for students last year?

Mrs. Smith: I do not have that number. The lower grades had more than the higher grades.

Mrs. Miller opened the floor to public comment reminding the public that you step up to the microphone, state your name and street address for public record. There is a two-minute limit. Mrs. Miller will alternate between zoom and in person. "The School Committee appreciates and thanks everyone for all the feedback that was sent in either through the Community Feedback Form or through emails. Every one of them has been read." Mrs. Miller opened the floor for public comment for 2 minutes.

Public Comment was given by residents Brian Schilling-27 Pine Street, Allison Taylor-19 Homer Road, Ed Bratz-52 Brook Circle, Michelle Dailey-8 Great Acres Drive, Erin Egan-180 Dillingham Way, Lisa Adams-919 Broadway, Tom McNamara-61 Damon Road, Kara Dougherty, 126 Main Street, Mike Heffron, 1007 Webster Street, Sean Murphy, 86 Jefferson Road, Tim Shaughnessy-170 Grove Street, and Karalyn Austin-54 Absalom Way. Residents expressed their concern with the *Mask Mandate* that DESE is enforcing and asked the School Committee to consider going against DESE. Please refer to the Hanover Public Schools website for the [August 26, 2021](#) School Committee Meeting for more detail.

School Committee Discussion on School Opening: Mrs. Miller explained that the current Mask Policy EBCFA needs to be rescinded as it is no longer applicable. Mr. Ferron added that this is the policy that was enacted September 2020 for the 2020-2021 school year in dealing with face coverings based on last year's rules.

Motion entertained by Mrs. Miller to rescind our *Mask Policy EBCFA*. The motion was moved by Mrs. Corbo and seconded by Mrs. Hall. Roll call vote: Ruth Lynch – aye, Peter Miraglia – aye, Libby Corbo – aye, Ryan Hall – aye, and Leah Miller – aye. The motion carried unanimously.

The School Committee began discussions and deliberations on school opening. Mrs. Miller is asking that the School Committee take a stand and review the following statement to DESE and the Governor regarding local control. The statement reads as follows: *“We as a School Committee implore DESE and the Governor to return all COVID litigation efforts to the local school control on October 1st. We have been intently involved in all aspects of this pandemic from the very beginning. We know our community data and know our community needs and wants. For 18-months, we worked collaboratively with our town Board of Health, Nurses, and Administration. We have implemented a robust testing and contact tracing program. We feel confident that we can meet the needs of the families while keeping our community safe.”*

Comments:

Mrs. Corbo stated that “the Committee is just seeing this proposed face-covering policy today. Typically, we take a review and a vote at our next meeting. Could we table the approval of this policy so the Committee or the Superintendent can reach out with our questions so we can answer the public?”

Mr. Ferron agreed that this is acceptable. He reiterated that we have to follow the mandate and if the policy states we will follow the mandate that it will be ok.

Mrs. Ryan wanted to know what the impact would be going into the school year without a clear face-covering policy for families and students.

Mrs. Corbo's reluctance to enact a policy that says that we are going to comply when we do not know all of the legal ramifications and we have not provided the public with the answers to their questions regarding our duty as a School Committee to enforce the policy from DESE.

Mrs. Lynch added that these are two separate issues. The first being a question that has never been asked. Does the School Committee have the authority to reject the mask mandate and not follow it? That is the question! There are hundreds of mandates that have come from DESE. The second issue is that Mrs. Miller has suggested that the School Committee write a statement asking DESE and the governor to turn the responsibility back to the local School Committee.

Mr. Ferron recommends that the Committee checks with MASC to answer that question. It would support our leadership team if the School Committee could endorse the DESE mandate so we can move forward and enforce it.

Motion entertained by Corbo to table the Mask Policy EBCFA on face coverings until the next School Committee meeting. The motion was seconded by Hall. Ryan Hall – aye, Libby Corby – aye, Leah Miller – aye, Peter Miraglia – no, and Ruth Lynch – no. The motion carried with a majority vote.

Mrs. Miller wanted to discuss if the Committee should make a statement asking for local control back or any other statement. Each Committee member can advocate individually with DESE and the governor. If the Committee advocates together, it must be done at the meeting and a vote must be taken.

Mrs. Corbo appreciates the statement and noted that she did reach out to DESE, Commissioner Riley, and the Board of Education and did not receive a response. Mrs. Corbo does feel as a Committee they may have a

stronger voice. She did like the statement that was proposed to be sent out stating that “we want control returned to our local board. She supports the drafted statement and its intention.”

Mrs. Lynch added “We voted to table the policy to give more time for us to review it and I also would like the statement tabled as well, since it was just sent this afternoon.” She would like to see the information from MASC before the statement goes out.

Mrs. Miller added that the information we receive from MASC will not change the request to give the school committee back decision-making power.

Mrs. Lynch reiterated that Mrs. Miller is stating that we are not in favor of the mandate and the School Committee would have not made that decision had they had local control?

Mrs. Miller agreed but that is not the answer they are looking for from MASC.

Mr. Miraglia does not support the statement. He thinks that for issues like this should be at the State and Federal level. He believes masks should be worn and reminded everyone that you cannot get on public transportation without a mask. It is a federal mandate and no one argues about it. We are not health experts and this is a tough decision. He feels that the Committee doesn’t have the power to know what is best. He wants his kids to be in school. He states that this is very divisive and that he doesn’t want to wear a mask either.

Mrs. Hall added that she is in support of the statement and is open to edits. “We were elected to represent the parents of this community and they are asking for us to fight for them to at least make a decision for what is best in Hanover. This is the only step at this time that we can make in support of those parents. She notes that as elected officials, these hard decisions need to be made by the Committee.” Mrs. Hall fully supports a statement to ask DESE to put the local control back in the hands of the Committee that they can make decisions for Hanover, Hanover Public Schools, and the families.

Mrs. Lynch discussed the Community Feedback Form that was set up. Everyone on the Committee has read all comments. Mrs. Lynch tabulated the responses: seventy-six parents said “yes to masks” with seventy-seven parents saying “no masks” and seventy-six parents said “it should be their decision.” She asked what did this give us as far as what parents wanted? She then looked at the data from September 16th to 21st and sixty-nine parents said “yes” to mask and twenty parents said “no masks.” Mrs. Lynch thought this might correlate with the Commissioner coming out on Monday with the mask mandate.

Discussion:

Mrs. Corbo liked the statement that Mrs. Miller submitted but would like to add the measures we have taken as a community to bolster that statement and her statement is as follows: *“The Hanover School Committee urges DESE and Governor Baker to restore school COVID mitigation efforts including mask requirements to local control on October 1st. As grounds, therefore, we state that local governess is in the best position to assess individual community needs and considered unique community resources that impact the risk of COVID transmission in our schools. Hanover, for instance, has a nationally recognized COVID testing program via our Mobile Integrated Health Unit (MIH), we have a robust contract tracing department and have invested considerable financial resources in improving our air circulation in each school building. We, also, have strong collaborative relationships with our town departments including the Town Emergency Management Team and our Board of Health. We strongly believe that local governess including our school committee can best determine the best approach to COVID mitigation in our community while meeting the needs of families while keeping our community safe.”*

Mrs. Corbo noted that the only change to the statement is to edit it to read; *“to local control on **or before** October 1st.”*

Mrs. Miller entertained a motion to submit the statement as edited to DESE, Commission Riley, and Governor Baker regarding COVID mitigation efforts to local control on behalf of the School Committee. The motion was moved by Corbo and seconded by Hall. Roll call vote: Ryan Hall – aye, Libby Corbo – aye, Leah Miller – aye, Peter Miraglia – no, and Ruth Lynch – no. The motion carried with a majority vote.

Mrs. Lynch wants it on the record that the committee only received this information within a matter of five hours before the meeting and that “it is unfair and disappointing to run a Committee this way without giving people time to process, ask questions, and think about it. Mrs. Lynch stated she is not comfortable voting “yes” for that reason.

Mrs. Miller will submit this statement on behalf of the School Committee as a result of the majority vote.

Mr. Miraglia feels strongly that since we tabled the face-covering policy that we should have some kind of motion affirming that we as a Committee will follow the DESE mandate; thus, the Committee will show support of the administration and teachers who have to enforce the mask mandate. Also, parents will know the Committee stands behind this Mandate, even if we do not like it.

Mr. Ferron stated we need to know that we have the support of this Committee to follow the mask mandate and what we need to do. This Committee supports what we need to do to open the schools. We do not need to vote on it.

The next School Committee meeting is scheduled for September 15th, 2021. Expected agenda items will be: FY ‘22 Budget Update, Health Update, Homeschool Approvals, FACE Field Trip

Mrs. Miller wanted to remind the community they can always reach out and that the Feedback Forum link is still up and open.

Motion by Miraglia to adjourn the open session at 8:55 PM. The motion was seconded by Corbo. Roll call vote: Ryan Hall – aye, Ruth Lynch – aye, Pete Miraglia – aye, and Leah Miller – aye. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Tahnee Warner

Tahnee Warner
Executive Assistant/ Recording Secretary