

LOWELL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

Date: May 20, 2020
Time: 6:30PM
Location: Join Zoom Meeting
<https://zoom.us/j/98830970901?pwd=NUQ0Qk9VbjhsUVF5UlpjVU1jWjlzQT09>

Meeting ID: 988 3097 0901
Password: Wednesday

1. SALUTE TO FLAG

2. ROLL CALL

On a roll call at 6:35 p.m., all members were present, namely: Ms. Martin, Ms. Clark, Mr. Descoteaux, Mr. Dillon, Ms. Doherty, Mr. Hoey and Mayor Leahy.

MEMORIALS:

A moment of silence was held for the following:

Pam Daley, Daley School Psychologist

Dino DeSilva, Retired Custodian

Eugene Welch, Retired Teacher

3. SPECIAL ORDER OF BUSINESS

3.1. This Meeting Is Being Held Remotely In Accordance With The Governor Of Massachusetts' March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions Of The Open Meeting Law G.L. C. 30A, Section 20.

Mayor Leahy read to the public that this meeting was being held remotely in accordance with the Governor of Massachusetts' March 12, 2020 order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law G.L.C. 30A, Section 20.



4. MINUTES

4.1. Approval of the Minutes of the Meeting of the Lowell School Committee of May 6, 2020

Mr. Dillon made a motion to approve and place on file the Minutes of the Regularly Scheduled Lowell School Committee Meeting of Wednesday, May 6, 2020; seconded by Mr. Hoey. 7 yeas APPROVED

5. PERMISSION TO ENTER

5.1. Permission to Enter: May 20, 2020

Mr. Dillon made a motion to approve the Permission to Enter; seconded by Mr. Descoteaux. 7 yeas APPROVED

6. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

6.1. FY21 Budget Update

Gen Parasole spoke to the Committee about the FY21 Budget Update

Superintendent Boyd addressed the Committee and stated the following:

“We are now less than six weeks from the transition from FY20 to FY21. On our original budget calendar, tonight’s meeting was scheduled for the Committee to take formal action on the FY21 budget as it would typically do in a typical year. But this year has been anything but typical. Families across Lowell and across the world are feeling the effects of COVID-19. Families have lost loved ones, more and more are losing their incomes, some longstanding nationwide chains are starting to shutter for good and while the governor recently announced a phased reopening plan, a return to “normalcy” remains months away. Tonight, we are yet again faced with an unprecedented decision. The district is in need of an FY21 budget, but there are still far too many unknowns for the Committee to responsibly adopt any type of annual budget at this time. Thus, following discussions with the City, I am recommending that we take advantage of the flexibility provided by the state and proceed with a 1/12 budget for the month of July.

Authorizing a 1/12th budget for July will enable us as a district to continue to move forward with the required budgeting calendar while still remaining flexible to the evolving context we find ourselves in due to COVID-19. Now a 1/12 budget can lead to some sense of false hope. It’s important for us all to keep in mind that this is not an annual budget. It is in many ways simply utilizing the flexibility the state has authorized and the city has recommended to extend the current FY20 fiscal year for a 13th month. It buys time and hopefully the financial picture starts to become clearer. But as Ms. Turner will share in some detail during the presentation, a 1/12th budget for July cannot simply be repeated 12 times over to get us through the fiscal year. The district’s cost basis changes month to month and increases significantly once the academic year begins. Schools require more stability than a one month budget can provide and our current hiring freeze will need to be lifted at some point in the not-too-distant future in order for us to open schools in the fall.

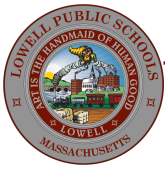


So, while a 1/12th budget for the month of July 2020 is my recommendation tonight, there are a few important points to keep in mind.

1. Given the continuing statewide fiscal uncertainty, we are also proceeding with the scenario-based planning that began in April. The budget book shared during our last meeting built out just one plausible scenario of level services. We now believe it prudent to also build out a level funding scenario with that same detail. A level funding scenario was previously identified as worst-case, but it now seems more likely and a further reduction in revenue may even be possible. Indeed, some surrounding districts are planning scenarios based on a 20% reduction in state aid.
2. Due to increased fixed costs which must be accounted for in any scenario, level funding would require \$6.7 million in additional programmatic reductions beyond the level services scenario that was outlined in the draft budget book and discussed in-depth during our last meeting. Over the coming weeks, we will be working with our union partners and collaborating with our school-based leaders to consider the options available to us to effectively balance the budget under that type of scenario.

With each of the scenarios we've previously developed, we've been able to hold school based budgets harmless and avoid any discussion of furloughs or layoffs, but with a level funding scenario - the scenario that we now need to plan out given the continued declining economic conditions - balancing the budget will not be possible without also looking at those two areas. Our shift to Fair Student Funding this year has positioned us well to ensure that any reduction to school based budgets are equitable and conducted with the voices of those closest to our children - teachers, parents and principals. We will also be engaging our union partners in the days ahead to discuss all possible options to reduce the contractually required fixed cost increases. Again, while it is prudent for us to plan for every scenario given the many unknowns, we remain hopeful this scenario will not become reality and additional federal stimulus money finds its way to Massachusetts.

3. There remain additional variables that could also significantly affect the expense side of the FY21 budget. Our transportation vendors, through their respective counsels, have requested millions of dollars from the district for the time period during which transportation was not provided due to the closure. As mentioned previously in response to Committee Member Hoey's motion from April, the Solicitor's current opinion is that payment is not legally authorized, but there is a bill circulating in the legislature which could alter that opinion. At the same time, two of our charter schools have requested amendments to their charters which could significantly increase the budgetary impact of the charters on the district. We believe the law doesn't allow those amendments to proceed due to the budget backlash. But like the bus vendors, we may find ourselves in a place where opposing counsels disagree.
4. We also do not yet have guidance from the state on reopening or what may be required in terms of PPE and facility adjustments to enable social distancing at all times; variables which could require significant investments that cannot yet be fully assessed. In addition to scenario-based fiscal planning, we are also engaging in scenario-based academic planning for the fall semester, including scenarios of continued remote learning, returning to on campus learning and hybrid approaches which include both remote and on-campus learning operating in tandem. We will share the details of that planning once the frameworks become more concrete. But, needless to say, each scenario would likely have a different impact on the FY21 line item budget.



5. Within all of this uncertainty, there is some positive news and much needed financial relief coming in the form of the CARES act. We are expecting approximately \$4 million in revenue through the CARES act to be available for FY21. But I need to emphasize - this is not extra money. Within level funding, we would need to plan for additional cuts of \$6.7 million beyond the budget book that was shared previously. Now with the CARES act relief we can offset a portion of those required additional cuts through the grant.

With that said, despite the many unknowns of this unprecedented time, our community should have full confidence that Lowell Public Schools will be prepared for any reality that we encounter now and into the future. It will not be easy, answers may not come as quickly as any of us would like and the budgeting process will be unfortunately drawn out over the course of the summer months, but every decision will be made with the best interests of our 14,500 children and the ongoing safety of our entire city in mind.” Ms. Turner, Chief Financial Officer then proceeded to discuss the budget with the Committee page by page.

Ms. Martin made a motion to hold a Public Budget Hearing on Wednesday, June 3, 2020; seconded by Ms. Doherty. 7 years APPROVED

7. MOTIONS

7.1. [By Michael Dillon Jr.]: Request the Superintendent provide an update on the Creegan TV Studio (staffing, technology capabilities, and usage) for discussion on incorporating online content production into future technology planning.

Mr. Dillon made a motion to approve; seconded by Mr. Hoey. 7 years APPROVED

7.2. [By Bob Hoey]: In consideration of the stress and issues that students are dealing with because of COVID-19, request the Superintendent initiate a Task Force to look at how to take advantage of all our staff’s skills to best transition from this school year to the next school year.

Mr. Hoey made a motion to approve; seconded by Mr. Descoteaux. 7 years APPROVED

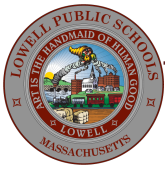
7.3. [By Bob Hoey]: That the Facilities Subcommittee meet to talk about procedures to name areas of the new Lowell High School and to determine whether current dedications will carry over to the new Lowell High School from the current school building.

Mr. Hoey made a motion to approve; seconded by Mr. Dillon. 7 years APPROVED

8. REPORTS OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

8.1. Report on Motions

Superintendent Boyd provided the Committee with an updated report on the status of outstanding motions and asked the Committee if they had any concerns or questions.



Ms. Martin made a motion to accept the following Reports of the Superintendent 8.1 through 8.1.5 as reports of progress; seconded by Mr. Descoteaux. 7 yeas APPROVED

8.1.1. Response to Motions 5.COO of 04/01/20 by Andy Descoteaux

Status on Judicial Building

By Andy Descoteaux]: Ask the Superintendent to ask the City Manager what the status is of the empty judicial buildings in the city. If they are available for city use, the LPS could use one or two.

Dr. Hall, Chief Operating Officer provided a report to the Committee informing them that he has relayed this request to the City regarding the status of the empty judicial buildings. The report includes some initial analysis that was done in the Fall of 2019 pertaining to the renovation of the district court. There were parking, zoning, and historical considerations which limited uses for the District Court building on Hurd Street. A proposed use as a police facility had been reviewed in depth. It appears that the Hurd Street side will be temporarily used to alleviate parking needs, while a future use is studied.

Ms. Martin made a motion to accept the following Reports of the Superintendent 8.1 through 8.1.5 as reports of progress; seconded by Mr. Descoteaux. 7 yeas APPROVED

8.1.2. Response to Motions 9.CAO of 04/15/20 by Jackie Doherty

Student Dropouts

[by Jackie Doherty]: Request the Superintendent provide the committee with a report that examines the factors that may have contributed to tripling the number of student dropouts over the last few years including staff reductions, discontinued actions, or program changes.

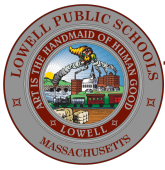
Dr. Guillory, Chief Schools Officer and Ms. Desmond, Chief Academic Officer provided a report to the Committee that informed them that the dropout rate for the 2016-2017 school year was 1.2%, for 2017-2018 school year the dropout rate rose to 2.8%, and for 2018-2019 school year the dropout rate increased to 3.7%. This increase has been a result of a myriad of factors to include staffing, programming, policies, community resources and the student population.

Ms. Martin made a motion to accept the following Reports of the Superintendent 8.1 through 8.1.5 as reports of progress; seconded by Mr. Descoteaux. 7 yeas APPROVED

8.1.3. Response to Motions 14.CAO of 05/06/20 by Andy Descoteaux and 2.CSO of 04/15/20 by Connie Martin

Remote learning & Snow Days

[by Andy Descoteaux]: Ask the Superintendent to ask DESE if what we can develop as a plan for remote learning could be used to cover snow days; thereby eliminating the need to make up snow days at the end of the year.



Remote Learning Policy

[By Connie Martin]: Requesting that the Administration report on the roll out and implementation of the District-wide Remote Learning Policy. The report should include the recommended benchmarks and outcome measures that the district will be using to track both short and long term effectiveness of the existing plan.

Dr. Guillory, Chief Schools Officer and Ms. Desmond, Chief Academic Officer provided a report to the Committee that informed them that on Friday, April 24th, new remote learning guidance was issued by DESE to carry us through the end of the school year. The document builds on the initial guidance offered on March 26, 2020, with a deeper emphasis on new learning. It stated that now teaching and learning should include a focus on the content standards most critical for student success in the next grade level, or “prerequisite standards”. Upon receiving the new information, the Curriculum Coordinators reviewed and updated the curriculum maps that had already been shared with teachers for the remainder of the school year.

Ms. Martin made a motion to accept the following Reports of the Superintendent 8.1 through 8.1.5 as reports of progress; seconded by Mr. Descoteaux. 7 yeas APPROVED

8.1.4. Response to Motions 12.CAO of 04/15/20 by Michael Dillon Jr.

Athletic Director Responsibilities

[by Michael Dillon Jr.]: Request the Administration provide a report on the position of Athletic Director at Lowell HS including a job description, outline of responsibilities, number of teams/ programs, number of staff, and any other relevant information available.

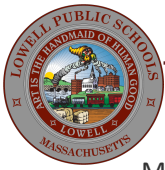
Ms. Desmond, Chief Academic Officer provided a report to the Committee that included the job description that relates to the roles and responsibilities of the Lowell Public School’s Athletic Director. The Athletic Director is responsible for the oversight of thirty-one (31) athletic teams throughout the school year. The Athletic Director is also responsible for supervision and evaluation of the nine (9) physical education teachers working at Lowell High School.

Ms. Martin made a motion to accept the following Reports of the Superintendent 8.1 through 8.1.5 as reports of progress; seconded by Mr. Descoteaux. 7 yeas APPROVED

8.1.5. Response to Motions 9.CAO & 13.CEEO of 04/15/20 by Jackie Doherty

Mental Health & SSS, SW Roles

[by Jackie Doherty]: motion to get a report from the administration that outlines the structures in place to support the mental health needs of our students. The report should include the roles of the Student Support Specialists and Social Workers, as well as address the delivery and oversight of mental health supports across the district.



Ms. Desmond, Chief Academic Officer and Ms. Latifah Phillips, Chief Equity and Engagement Officer provided a narrative response to the first part of the motion, including structures in place to support the mental health needs of our students as well as delivery and oversight. The District currently has forty-three (43) social workers. There are twenty-nine (29) building based social workers and fourteen (14) special education social workers. Between them they service all school buildings in Lowell. The social workers provide direct support for the mental health needs of our students across the district. Social Workers maintain communication and partnerships with the community agencies that our students most frequently interface with. The report included job descriptions for Social Workers and the District Support Specialists.

Mr. Hoey asked for a breakdown of the number of social workers over the last few budget cycles.

Ms. Martin made a motion to accept the following Reports of the Superintendent 8.1 through 8.1.5 as reports of progress; seconded by Mr. Descoteaux. 7 yeas APPROVED

9. NEW BUSINESS

9.1. Portrait of a Graduate Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) Proposal

Ms. Latifah Phillips, Chief Equity and Engagement Officer requested approval for the district to use Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) approach and to partner with community organizations to conduct authentic community engagement that connects communities in Lowell to the Portrait of a Graduate Initiative.

Ms. Clark made a motion to approve the Portrait of a Graduate Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) Proposal; seconded by Ms. Doherty. 7 yeas APPROVED

9.2. Approval of Proposed Updated Job Descriptions for Summer School In Consideration of Need for Remote Learning

Summer school job descriptions have changed due to remote learning. The job descriptions now include needing experience with zoom and google classroom.

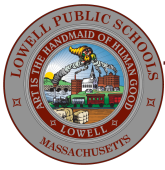
Ms. Doherty made a motion to approve the Proposed Updated Job Descriptions for Summer School In Consideration of Need for Remote Learning; seconded by Ms. Martin. 6 yeas, 1 nay (Mayor Leahy) APPROVED

10. PROFESSIONAL PERSONNEL

10.1. UTL: Sick Leave

The Members of the United Teachers of Lowell hereby donate twenty-eight [28] sick leave days to Kristen Colon, Lowell High School teacher.

Mr. Hoey made a motion to approve; seconded by Mr. Descoteaux. 7 yeas APPROVED



11. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Hoey made a motion to adjourn at 9:07 p.m.; seconded by Mr. Descoteaux. 7 yeas APPROVED

Respectfully submitted,

**Joel D. Boyd, Ed.D., Superintendent and
Secretary to the Lowell School Committee**

JDB/mes