



LOWELL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

Date:	October 06, 2021
Time:	6:30PM
Location:	City Council Chamber, 375 Merrimack Street, 2nd Floor, Lowell, MA 01852

1. SALUTE TO FLAG

2. ROLL CALL

On a roll call at 6:36 p.m., members present were, namely: Mr. Dillon, Ms. Doherty, Mr. Lay, Mayor Leahy, Ms. Martin, Ms. Clark and Mr. Descoteaux.

3. SPECIAL ORDER OF BUSINESS

3.1. Introduction of Newly Elected Lowell High School Senior Class Senator- Christopher Ferriera

Mayor Leahy introduced Mr. Ferriera and welcomed him to the meeting.

4. MINUTES

4.1. Approval of the Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Lowell School Committee of Wednesday, September 15, 2021

Mr. Dillon made a motion to accept and place on file the minutes from the Regularly Scheduled and the Special School Committee Meetings of Wednesday, September 15, 2021 and Thursday, September 23, 2021; seconded by Mr. Descoteaux. 7 yeas APPROVED

4.2. Approval of the Minutes of the Regularly Scheduled Lowell School Committee Meeting of Wednesday, September 15, 2021

Mr. Dillon made a motion to accept and place on file the minutes from the Regularly Scheduled and the Special School Committee Meetings of Wednesday, September 15, 2021 and Thursday, September 23, 2021; seconded by Mr. Descoteaux. 7 yeas APPROVED



4.3. Approval of the Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Lowell School Committee of Thursday, September 23, 2021

Mr. Dillon made a motion to accept and place on file the minutes from the Regularly Scheduled and the Special School Committee Meetings of Wednesday, September 15, 2021 and Thursday, September 23, 2021; seconded by Mr. Descoteaux. 7 yeas APPROVED

5. PERMISSION TO ENTER

5.1. Permission to Enter: October 6, 2021

Mr. Dillon made a motion to approve all the Permission to Enter contracts with the exception of the contract for Liza A. Talusan PH.D. in the amount of \$24,750; seconded by Ms. Martin. 7 yeas APPROVED

Ms. Martin made a motion to approve the contract for Liza A. Talusan PH.D. in the amount of \$24,750; seconded by Mr. Lay. 6 yeas, 1 nay (Mr. Dillon) APPROVED

6. MEMORIALS

6.1. Joseph Sexton, Jr., Retired McAvinnue School Teacher

6.2. Patrick Wayne, Lowell High School Graduate

7. MOTIONS

7.1. [By Hilary Clark]: Request a Human Resources and Labor Relations subcommittee meeting to review and discuss Superintendent's strategic goals for academic year 2021-2022.

This motion was withdrawn and the Superintendent's strategic goals for academic year 2021-2022 will be discussed at the next School Committee meeting.

7.2. [By Michael Dillon Jr.]: Request the committee readdress the Lowell Public Schools mask policy in general, particularly regarding physical activity.

Mr. Dillon asked for Superintendent Boyd's guidance around possible outcomes regarding defying the state's policy.

Superintendent stated that he could not defy the law of the land, but will check with legal counsel and report back to the Committee.

Several Committee members requested COVID-19 updates to be on the agenda moving forward.

Mr. Dillon stated that he is less worried about the number of people who have COVID-19 and more interested in hospitalizations and fatalities due to COVID-19 and would like that included in the report.



Mr. Dillon made a motion to approve; seconded by Mr. Lay. 3 yeas, 4 nays (Ms. Doherty, Ms. Martin, Ms. Clark, Mr. Descoteaux) FAILS

7.3. [By Michael Dillon Jr.]: Request that the committee and administration discuss initial steps required to improve our district map/ school assignment policy.

Mr. Dillon stated he believes it's time that we looked at the policy especially now that district representation is how we are electing officials.

Several Committee members expressed concern about going against the consent decree.

Mr. Descoteaux stated that he would like the Superintendent to meet with the City Manager to explore another school on the other side of the river that he believes would alleviate some of the problems.

Mr. Dillon made a motion to approve; seconded by Mr. Descoteaux. 2 yeas, 5 nays (Ms. Doherty, Mr. Lay, Ms. Martin, Ms. Clark, Mr. Descoteaux) FAILS

7.4. [By Michael Dillon Jr.]: Request the Superintendent update the committee on current staffing of School Resource Officers in Lowell Public Schools.

Mr. Dillon made a motion to approve; seconded by Ms. Martin. 7 yeas APPROVED

8. SUBCOMMITTEES

8.1. Facilities & Transportation Subcommittee: Report and Approval of the Minutes of the Meeting of Monday, September 27, 2021 [Jackie Doherty, Chairperson]

Chairperson Doherty informed the Committee that the district is looking to address the many HVAC deficiencies. Given the current state of the HVAC equipment an RFP (Request for Proposals) has been issued. This proposal includes all schools in the district (except for Lowell High School).

Ms. Doherty made a motion to set aside \$15,203,840 in ESSER funds for facilities and to accept the report as a report of progress; seconded by Mr. Dillon. 7 yeas APPROVED

9. REPORTS OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

Mr. Lay made a motion to take the agenda out of order; seconded by Mr. Dillon. 7 yeas APPROVED

9.1. Enrollment Report

Fred McOsker registered and spoke on this agenda item.

Ms. Phillips, Chief of Equity and Engagement provided a report to the Committee that informed them that for state reporting, which is the process that determines the foundational funding for Lowell Public



Schools, the district's Office of Performance Management reports only student enrollment numbers for the district's twenty-eight (28) schools. For the state reporting October snapshot, as of today, the district has a total of 14,173 students enrolled in our twenty-eight (28) schools. This number is currently up 150 students from last year's 2020 October snapshot; however, the number will not be finalized until the October verification process is completed on October 2nd.

Ms. Martin requested a report that tracks the 394 students that were discussed at the Special Meeting on September 23, 2021. She stated that she also wants to know how we can address the issues and track the progress.

Ms. Doherty requested that her statements and questions be part of the record.

Ms. Doherty stated that she spoke with Ms. Moffett from the Health Department and was informed that the Lowell Health Department follows MA DPH law that states students cannot attend school unless immunizations records are verified and complete, except in cases where immunizations are against their religious beliefs and a parent submits a signed letter attesting to that, they will then receive a documented medical exception. She stated it also applies if they are McKinney Vento (homeless) students who are given an immediate seat and have a thirty (30) day extension to get immunizations. She stated that she was told that there has been an unprecedented amount of problems with data overall and was told that the key factors for the backlog is as follows:

- Lots of Inaccuracies (Name is different from birth certificate—creates new file).
- Immunization information is blank.
- Immunization information not translated.
- Immunization record not readable (if FRC can't read it, the nurses won't be able to read it)
- Wrong person's Immunization document scanned (parent, sibling, or unrelated record scanned in instead of child in question).

Ms. Doherty stated that she was informed that the past process was that they typically check immunizations throughout the summer and that two (2) weeks before school started this year the Health Department was on track with only ninety-six (96) records left, but suddenly three hundred (300) names were added that had not been on spreadsheet just prior October 1st. Ms. Doherty asked why we had problems with the translations this year as compared to past years. She asked what happened to the translation company the district previously worked with. She asked to receive information on what schools the new students were being distributed to, because she has heard concerns about new students being unfairly distributed throughout district and stated that she was told that one (1) school received twenty-four (24) students and one (1) school received fifteen (15) and some schools received none. She asked how that is equitable for staff and students especially when the district knows many of these students are missing immunization records and newcomers. She asked how we are addressing technology problems and who is trained and who needs to be trained. She stated that she has heard concerns that there is lots of misinformation and that there is no longer any institutional knowledge. She stated she's hearing new hires are not being trained and that no one knows Aspen (the program the district has had in place for decades). She asked how are we supporting families and that the concerns she's hearing is that phones are not being answered and that families are being told to go home and register online.



Ms. Clark stated using technology and that the portable is a great resource for families so they can receive updates.

Ms. Martin made a motion to accept the Reports of the Superintendent 9.1 through 9.3 as reports of progress; seconded by Mr. Dillon. 7 yeas APPROVED

9.2. 2021 Spring MCAS Results

Mr. Skinner, Chief Schools Officer provided a report to the Committee that stated in spring 2021, more than 6,100 students of Lowell Public Schools in grades 3–8 and 10 participated in at least one (1) MCAS test, with an average participation rate of 88% in grades 3-8 and 83-85% in high school compared to the statewide rate of 93-97% at grades 3-8 and 89-90% for high school ELA and mathematics. In 2021, students in grades 3-8 took abridged versions of the test and many students took the exam at home. These circumstances, coupled with the stress and disruption of the pandemic, had an effect on results across the state and in our district. In an effort to support students, families, and schools, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) implemented a number of flexibilities, including some that were made available by the U.S. Department of Education and the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) in acknowledgement of the challenges of the pandemic. For grades 3 - 8, these changes included lengthening the test administration windows until almost the end of the school year, shortening the testing experience (students took only one session of the tests instead of two sessions), and allowing students who were learning remotely at the time of testing to take the assessments remotely. For high school, testing windows were extended and began later in the year. In addition, in April 2021, BESE voted to allow students in the class of 2022 to be awarded a modified competency determination (CD) in ELA and mathematics upon district certification that the student earned full credit for a relevant course in that subject matter. Students in the class of 2022 were still permitted to voluntarily participate in testing for scholarship purposes. The report included information about the spring 2021 test administrations, including administration dates and numbers of sessions. All MCAS test administrations are untimed. The department provides recommended session lengths to assist schools with planning. The report also included the percentage of students scoring at each achievement level on the 2020 next-generation ELA tests. The percentage of students scoring Meeting Expectations or higher ranged from a high of 47% at grade 10 to a low of 22% at grade 8. The percentage of students by student group, scoring Meeting Expectations or higher ranged from a high of 33% for Asian, White and 32% for Multi-racial, Non-Hispanic and 32% for Female students to a low of 6% for Students with Disabilities.

Ms. Martin made a motion to accept the Reports of the Superintendent 9.1 through 9.3 as reports of progress; seconded by Mr. Dillon. 7 yeas APPROVED

9.3. 2021-2022 Key Performance Indicators

Ms. Martin made a motion to refer the 2021-2022 Key Performance Indicators report to a School Improvement & Performance Management Subcommittee for further discussion; seconded by Ms. Clark 7 yeas APPROVED



9.4. Home Education

Superintendent Boyd recommended that the following parents/guardians be allowed to home educate their child:

Lynne Garthe
8 Cheney Place

Jennifer McDonald
746 Lakeview Avenue Apt. 8

Lauren Wuthrich
195 Trull Lane East

Mr. Dillon made a motion to approve; seconded by Mr. Clark. 7 yeas APPROVED

10. NEW BUSINESS

10.1. Vote to Accept a Donation of \$750.00 from Youth and Climate Change Initiative

The agenda item was deferred to the next School Committee meeting.

10.2. Budget Transfer

Ms. Martin made a motion to approve the budget transfer of \$5,000; seconded by Mr. Dillon. 7 yeas APPROVED

10.3. Consideration of Options to Increase Substitute Teacher Pool

Ms. Turner, Chief Financial Officer provided a report to the Committee that stated that most districts across the nation, have historically faced a shortage with substitute teachers and this has been significantly exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic. In FY18/19, 75% of absences were covered with substitutes leaving only 25% uncovered. In FY19/20, the number of covered absences decreased to 70% leaving 30% uncovered. Alarmingly, this number has now dropped to 37% covered and 63% uncovered during these first few weeks back to school since COVID. More than 60% of such absences are due to sick days (40%) and maternity leave (22.66%). The remainder are due to causes such as bereavement, jury duty, medical leave, professional development and religious holidays. Sick calls have increased since COVID in addition to the available substitute pool dropping from over 400 subs to only 81 listed this year. A comparison of the first weeks in September from the FY18/19 to this current year shows up to a 33% increase in absences. The first recommendation is to change the substitute rate. The rate for day to day substitutes has not increased for many years. The current hourly rate for subs with no degree is \$13/hr. which is little more than minimum wage. The rate for retired teachers is only \$17/hr. despite the average hourly rate of an active teacher being over \$70/hr. The actual substitute costs from Munis shows an average use of daily subs to be between 83 and 90. If the district increases the substitute hourly rates by \$2.50 each, the District cost would be approximately \$230,000. This increased rate may



improve our marketability. The second recommendation is to provide a Building Substitute at each of the Renaissance schools. Ten (10) Building Subs would be distributed among the seven (7) schools. The district cost is nearly \$1.5 million. The \$1.5 million would cover thirty-five (35) Building Substitutes which would be distributed through the schools using a .5, 1.0 or 2.0 ratio based on current enrollment. This would be a pilot year to see if this is effective. The district would work with AESOP software to see if there is a tracking mechanism that shows the need per school so that future allocations of building subs would be based on trend analysis rather than simply enrollment. The third recommendation would be to hire ten (10) additional paras that could serve specifically as building substitutes. After fifteen (15) days, paras are moved up to first year teacher rates which is approximately \$48k. Thus, the cost of this proposal would be \$13k higher than the building substitute idea. This cost proposal could be funded by ESSER dollars.

Ms. Martin asked if there would be any unemployment related costs.

Ms. Doherty asked how many teacher and paraprofessional positions remain unfilled.

Dr. Hall stated that he does not have the information in front of him, but believes it's under five (5) teachers and 5-10 paraprofessionals. He again reiterated that he didn't have the information in front of him and will provide it at the next meeting.

Ms. Martin made a motion to approve the substitute hourly rates by \$2.50; seconded by Ms. Clark. 7 yeas APPROVED

Ms. Martin made a motion to support and approve the paraprofessional pilot and to take the funds from the facilities money if needed; seconded by Ms. Clark. 5 yeas, 2 nays (Ms. Doherty, Mayor Leahy) APPROVED

10.4. Permission to Post: Transportation Account Clerk

Dr. Hall, Chief Operation Officer provided a report to the Committee that informed them the reduced supply of drivers caused by COVID-19 has had a particularly large impact on busing and that it has resulted in almost a daily re-routing and adjustment of routes. These issues have made it challenging to keep up with the dynamics of our transportation needs and in order to act to reduce some of these concerns and to improve responsiveness, he recommends that we deploy an additional position within the Transportation office. Adding an additional Account Clerk (6A) and/or an Assistant Director of Transportation have been analyzed. I recommend hiring an additional Account Clerk at this time. An Account Clerk would be approximately \$35,000-\$40,000 less than an Assistant Director of Transportation. The Director of Transportation supports the hiring of an Account Clerk as well.

Mr. Descoteaux made a motion to post the Transportation Account Clerk; seconded by Mr. Dillon. 7 yeas APPROVED



10.5. Approval of Updated Job Description and Permission to Post: Budget and Grants Analyst

Ms. Turner, Chief Academic Officer provided a report to the Committee asking them to approve and update the job description as well as post the Budget and Grants Analyst position. The report states that the change in title and job duties is to simply have both more accurately reflect the true nature of the job.

Mr. Dillon made a motion to approve the updated job description and to post the Budget and Grants Analyst; seconded by Ms. Clark. 7 yeas APPROVED

11. COMMUNICATIONS

11.1. Letter Sent to Leblanc School Parents

Mr. Descoteaux made a motion to accept the communication and to place it on file; seconded by Mr. Dillon. 7 yeas APPROVED



12. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Dillon made a motion to adjourn at 9:04 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