

Nantucket School Committee
Meeting Minutes – Remote Participation via ZOOM and Youtube
September 24, 2020

Present Members: Chair Pauline Proch, Vice Chair Jennifer Iller, Dr. Timothy Lepore, Steve Sortevisk and Zona Tanner-Butler (arrived 6:12). Also present from the Studio, NCTV Representative Matt Pommert and presenters as guests: Superintendent Elizabeth Hallett, Department of Public Health Director Roberto Santamaria, Principals Kubisch, McNeil, Horton, and Vasil, and Athletic Director Christopher Maury- Meeting is a Remote Participation Meeting via “ZOOM” in compliance with Governor Charles Baker’s mandate during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM, by Chair Pauline Proch who followed with reading into the Minutes, scripted instructions for procedure of this meeting under COVID requirements:

Read into the Meeting Minutes at the Start of the Meeting - Confirming Member Access:

This is Pauline Proch, Chair of the Nantucket School Committee. Permit me to confirm that all members and persons anticipated on the agenda are present and can hear me. Members, when I call your name, please respond in the affirmative: Jennifer Iller, Vice Chair, Zona Butler, Tim Lepore, Steve Sortevisk, Secretary.

Staff, when I call your name, please respond in the affirmative: Superintendent Elizabeth Hallett; School Committee Clerk, Logan O’Connor; Director of Technology, Jennifer Erichsen

Good evening. This Open Meeting of Nantucket School Committee is being conducted remotely consistent with Governor Baker’s Executive Order of March 12, 2020, due to the current State of Emergency in the Commonwealth due to the outbreak of the “COVID-19 Virus.” In order to mitigate the transmission of the COVID-19 Virus, we have been advised and directed by the Commonwealth to suspend public gatherings, and as such, the Governor’s Order suspends the requirement of the Open Meeting Law to have all meetings in a publicly accessible physical location. Further, all members of public bodies are allowed and encouraged to participate remotely.

The Order, which you can find posted with agenda materials for this meeting allows public bodies to meet entirely remotely so long as reasonable public access is afforded so that the public can follow along with the deliberations of the meeting. Ensuring public access does not ensure public participation unless such participation is required by law. This meeting will feature public comment.

For this meeting, Nantucket School Committee is convening by video conference via Zoom Webinar App as posted on the Town’s Website identifying how the public may join.

Each vote taken in this meeting will be conducted by roll call vote.

A request was made to make a change in the agenda, inviting DPH Director, Santamaria and Superintendent, Elizabeth Hallett to present and open for discussion the returning to Hybrid Education on October 1, 2020. A motion to amend and approve the agenda was made by Tim Lepore, seconded by Jennifer Iller and was approved unanimously by roll call vote.

Comments from the Public

Chair Proch opened comments from the public, citing her sensitivity to the time delay on the computer and invited people for their comments. Hearing none via the Zoom, but having one letter sent to her through email from Mr. Rob Giachetti, parent and community member, with a request to read it to the public at large, Chair Proch read into the minutes as follows:

“I want to start by acknowledging all the people on this call who have worked tirelessly toward a safe and effective return to school for our children. The circumstances you all are dealing with are incredibly challenging and are certainly not business as usual. This week I wrote a letter to Dr. Hallett and the Committee outlining my belief that we should return to school for full in-person learning, with a remote learning option for those who need or want it. The main point I want to make this evening is to urge the administration and the committee to make thoughtful decisions that reflect the objective reality in our community. In the face of the recent so-called “cluster” of COVID cases, followed by however many days in a row now without any new cases, it is easy to get caught in a seesaw of fear and reaction. We all heard the Governor say this afternoon that we need to avoid knee-jerk reactions to pockets of new cases. We know they are going to occur. I believe we overreacted to the last cluster by not applying our local knowledge and deciding to let the schools open as planned. We all know that the population denominator of 12,000 being used in the state’s heat map is false. Most estimates I have heard put the current number at 3-4 times that. Further, the DESE grants latitude at the local level, indicating that “While the Department strongly recommends the implementation of an in-person model of instruction, how local districts/schools will re-open in the fall, whether in-person, remote or hybrid is ultimately a local decision, made by the Superintendent of Schools in conjunction with the School Committee and other local officials.”

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It is curious that when we were 'white' or 'clear' on the heat map, we elected not to follow the Commonwealth's guidelines which advised reopening fully in person. We decided to implement more conservative measures and open in the hybrid model. Then, when we lit up a false 'red,' we suddenly decided to follow the guidelines and transition to full remote. It now seems apparent that we will return to hybrid learning as planned on October 1. We can be certain there will be additional clusters as we return to school. I urge the administration and the Committee to look at the objective reality with a very critical eye before shutting down once again. The impact on our kids is too great.

The handling of the last cluster proved that our system here is working. The source of the spread was determined, and contact tracing explained the path it took. The idea that a Labor Day gathering was the source turned out to be false. Further, there have been large beach parties constantly since June which did not lead to a 'surge'. College students partied together all summer; in particular over the 4th of July, both in and out-of-doors. High school students were all together and unmasked and not distancing at graduation; this did not lead to any 'surge'. They've been together ever since. Primary school children have been playing together all summer, in neighborhoods, at the beach, at the Boys and Girls club, playgrounds, baseball, ballet classes..... everywhere. The private schools have been back in session without any issues. So the notion that keeping our children out of school is going to make a meaningful difference is simply flawed. The only additional risk posed is the crossing of groups or pods who are not otherwise spending time together. In light of the overly conservative guidelines we have adopted for in person learning, this is certainly a manageable risk.

Thank you, Rob Giacchetti

Presentations and Discussion of interest to the Committee
October 1 – Returning to School, Hybrid Plan

Superintendent Hallett stated she was eager and excited to welcome students and teachers into the building on October 1 implementing the Hybrid Plan as originally planned. She talked about the decision of going remote for the first two weeks based on many discussions, calculations, and planning due to the rise in COVID-19 numbers after Labor Day weekend. With the spike and not knowing the trajectory of the infection numbers, a very conscious, but conservative determination was made in conjunction with the School Committee, the Town of Nantucket, the Department of Health, the Nantucket Teacher's Association and the District Leadership Team. The announcement was made to have school remote for two weeks with intention to see where things would move with health metrics and case numbers and everyone felt the tentative date of October 1 was a solid target. Mr. Roberto Santamaria, Director of Department of Public Health, responded the decision was NOT a knee jerk reaction, but rather a deliberate determination based on direct orders from the Department of Secondary Education and health metrics and guidance from both. He offered slides showing sewer samples, state population charts (old census data) and reviewed the trends and how to interpret them. Data is always one week out/behind. Additionally, any district that falls into the red zone, such as Nantucket recently, is assigned a state emergency task force that will offer operational guidance and Mr. Santamaria talked about how our "command center" helps us in determining prudent decisions. Based upon all of the facts and figures, Mr. Santamaria stated at this time, "Hybrid is the prudent decision.: Superintendent Hallett added the students, staff, parents are all ready to return to in person learning! Jennifer Iller felt it important to remind families this is a fluid situation and although difficult, to be flexible. Zona Butler asked about remaining in the red zone and we should be mindful of this designation and Tim Lepore wanted to confirm that only one case could keep us in the red, to which Mr. Santamaria affirmed, yes. Steve Sortevik asked about the positive sewer numbers and is troubled that while we seem to be consistent with our population of 17,000+ for a few years already and it seems odd the state will not recognize those numbers when calculating the metrics due to COVID. He asked how long the Town will run the sewer testing. He combined that with his personal worry about the possible back and forth in and out of school. Mr. Santamaria mentioned the CARES Act covering these testing costs and will continue provided funding exists. The Superintendent mentioned a letter that came from the State to those School Committees who are in the red designation and how attention should be paid to the calculation of numbers using various data points: age, weeks of cases, where, when, other medical situations, etc. There are important specifics to consider when making this decision. Chair Proch mentioned the numerous emails and weeks of comments made to the Committee about opening-up school and those asking why our district has been so restrictive. She asked Mr. Santamaria to comment on our Town and School being seemingly conversative. He answered that we, as a Town entity and, Public School district, answer to specific rules and mandates - we are governed by the state rulings, unlike private schools or other business'. He furthered, while that maybe challenging for many to understand, it is a fact. Chair Proch wondered about many who struggle with remote learning, she worries about the mental health component and recapped the website has a lot of information available.

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School Handbooks – Principals Kubisch, McNeil, Horton, Vasil

NES

Principal Kimberly Kubisch presented her entire handbook and a one-page snapshot of the changes made. In the handbook the changes are highlighted in yellow. She thanked School Council and their hard work from two years ago revamping much of the school handbook then and wanted to maintain that work. She reviewed the edits and additions/updates.

NIS

Principal Evemarie McNeil followed NES with a similar handbook for the Intermediate School but no highlighting. She thanked her School Council and Assistant Principal Donna Johnson and reviewed her changes, edits, and updates. She also mentioned an addendum specific to COVID-19 so that when we are not dealing with this pandemic the integrity of the Handbook still stands as presented. Jennifer Iller agreed they were thorough, and long, and wants more time to read them completely. Mrs. Butler asked to have the date on the documents and mentioned a few additional editorial suggestions. Dr. Lepore stated the handbooks are too big and no one will read them, and Mrs. Butler countered they will read them when they need to read them because of an issue or reason.

CPS

Principal Michael Horton stated the CPS Handbook went through a major revision. The redo was delayed from last year. Meeting with School Council in July and connecting with the NHS Principal, he decided it would be beneficial to align the CPS and NHS handbooks so transition from middle to high school was more routine in following rules, regulations and protocols. From revamping the table of contents, listing items alphabetically and adding a COVID Addendum he was proud of the document as presented. He made specific mention of a no cell phone policy, citing students at this age, unlike high school, do not necessarily need access to a cell phone during school hours. Mrs. Iller asked for Mr. Horton to double check the wording for age of bike helmets laws which led to discussion about the ruling and law and language of children or adults wearing a bike helmet.

NHS

Principal Mandy Vasil stated there were no changes made to the Handbook for this year. She agreed the aligning of CPS and NHS handbooks is a smart idea and will look to next year for a bit of an overhaul on the high school handbook. COVID-19 added more layers to an already busy start of her first year. She offered the Safety Protocols as an addendum specific to the COVID information.

Budget Directives

Superintendent Hallett has had preliminary discussions with Finance Director, Martin Anguelov and also Town Officials. She did not review all the directives but singled out a few bullet points: #2, extenuating circumstances due to COVID and consideration of additional expenditures surrounding an unknown, #5, continuing to support appropriate programs especially with consideration to COVID, #10, utility expenditures and/or possible savings due to changes in our daily routines in and out of the buildings, and #11, Food Service and NCS, both profoundly impacted during this challenging environment.

Budget Calendar

Superintendent Hallett stated outlining the calendar right now in its preliminary stage is challenging in process because at this time we do not necessarily understand our student/staff ratios and needs. COVID-19 has altered quarterly numbers from what would be expected and the only known is our roll forward numbers. Discussion with TON and FY22 projections has begun and we know we need to be conservative based on revenue loss. Dr. Hallett mentioned the Town Manager was in agreement to schedule one Ad Hoc meeting with all Committee Chairs to receive the same information and message simultaneously. The School Committee was glad to hear the resurrection of Ad Hoc. Steve Sortevik stated that TON still needs to vote on the override for Our Island Home and it is his opinion that this will be favorable in opening up free cash monies in the budget. Mr. Anguelov responded level funding is still potentially negative and even if that override moved forward, the free cash number would still be barely even and that there is no 'extra' money. He quoted the Town Manager as stating this Fiscal Year as "Bleak".

Athletic Update during COVID-19 – Director of Athletics, Christopher Maury

Director Chris Maury reported a lot has taken place during the last few weeks. MIAA created a COVID task force committee who leads the charge along with input from DESE, sports medicine doctor/specialists and multiple groups in determining t

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the best route of action for districts and interscholastic athletics. The full set of seasons (Fall, Winter, Spring) have been moved forward and tweaked slightly, adding a Fall II from 2/22/21-4/26/2021 to allow for a floating season for Football and Cheerleading to have competition. Some sports were greenlit to take place during normal schedule/season of play and some were moved in the hopes COVID-19 issues subside. Earlier in September, two districts, Barnstable and Nauset were instructed by their Administration not to travel to the Islands. That coupled with our interscholastic play opportunity was pushed forward due to the red zone designation caused the Superintendent and the AD to consider some alternatives. Figuring out the mandated time for 14 practices if we were to come out of the red metric zone pushed Nantucket to a start date of October 15. This would place us two weeks behind in league play. In discussions with the Superintendent and based on health metrics and safety protocols, it was determined to withdraw from interscholastic play for the Fall season and proceed with intramurals. The Athletic department has informed the students and families and is finalizing the structure for an inclusive on island intramural program scheduled to start October 1 - full five-day practices and games scattered in-between. Mr. Maury understands the announcement is disappointing but is committed to creating teams for grades 6-12 with this good plan in place. It offers practice, training, competition, social interaction for athletes and coaches and is important to the overall education of our island youth. Mrs. Iller was very appreciative of the focus and attention, and Mrs Butler agreed, this outlet is important especially during a stressful time. Dr. Lepore laughed about Winter months football wondering about the fields and the overlap of sports seasons. Mr. Maury assured the School Committee there would not be any overlap with MIAA padding some wiggle room built into the time slots of seasons.

Committee discussion and votes to be taken

Vote to Approve July 24, 2020 Executive Session Meeting Minutes Zona Butler made a motion to approve the minutes, Steve Sortevik seconded, and the motion was approved.

Vote to Approve September 9, 2020 Workshop/Executive Session Meeting Minutes Zona Butler made a motion to approve the minutes, Steve Sortevik seconded, and the motion was approved.

Vote to Approve September 10, 2020 Meeting Minutes Steve Sortevik made a motion to approve the minutes, Tim Lepore seconded, and the motion was approved.

Vote to Approve September 11, 2020 Executive Session Meeting Minutes Zona Butler made a motion to approve the minutes, Steve Sortevik seconded, and the motion was approved.

Vote to Approve the Transfers & Invoices Zona Butler made a motion to approve, Tim Lepore seconded, the motion was approved.

Superintendents Report

DESE Professional Development Days/First Days of School/Schoology

Commissioner Riley mandated the ten Professional Development days for all districts in Massachusetts working on Hybrid and Remote Plans. They were front loaded at the start of the academic year for training and learning opportunities, and to help shape blended learning, power standards, our new Learning Management System, building safety and health protocols. There were also opportunities for teacher planning, collaboration and co-teaching coordination to prepare for students' arrival.

Dr. Hallett continued, the first day drew near and NPS went to Remote because of the surge of COVID cases reported by the Department of Health and the Nantucket Cottage Hospital. On September 16, NPS opened in remote for two weeks through September 30. There were a few technology glitches but opening day was well received and both students and staff were excited to be in attendance, even if remotely.

Dr. Hallett introduced Curriculum & Assessment Directors, Amanda Bardsley and Jennifer Rabold who are taking the lead on Schoology, our Learning Management System, newly implemented this current year. Dr. Hallett explained a push from the state to offer a LMS was a directive, and Nantucket chose Schoology. The Director's explained how this system differs from Aspen, our Student Information System, which collects data required by the state,

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demographics, grades, student information. Schoology is a “one stop shop” for teachers, students and parents. A collection or landing/home page that offers an organized way to access all kinds of information such as links, playlists, APPS, virtual learning options, communications, collaboration opportunities, etc... It is a great tool for parents to get involved in groups and to find information pertaining to their students and for students to access anything pertaining to their education.

Mr. Sortevik asked if the Administrators had an idea of the number of students choosing to remote and can they change their mind during school. Dr. Hallett responded approximately 15-17% of the student body is remote and while it is the intention to give everyone their choice with regard to remotng and /or cohorts, it will depend on the numbers. We are bound to certain specifications in terms of size of rooms and numbers of desks to accommodate students and teachers, but we will accommodate as many as we can.

The Superintendent ended with much gratitude to The Harvey Foundation who donated Blue Light glasses for students and staff to cut screen glare due to the extra screen time. The School Committee were very appreciative. Chair Proch quickly reviewed the agenda, recognized the difficulty in coordinating our standard meeting times with the Town of Nantucket due to COVID restrictions of Open Meeting Law options and asked for a motion to adjourn.

At 8:24pm the School Committee adjourned on a motion made by Tim Lepore and seconded by Zona Butler, and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,
Logan O’Connor, School Committee Clerk