

Nantucket School Committee
Meeting Minutes – Remote Participation via ZOOM and Youtube
April 1, 2021

Present Members: Chair Pauline Proch, Secretary Steve Sortevik, Dr. Tim Lepore, and Zona Tanner Butler (left meeting at approximately 7:14). Also present from the Studio, NCTV Representative Matt Pommerfret and presenters as guests: Superintendent Elizabeth Hallett, Curriculum & Assessment, Humanities Director, Jennifer Rabold, Art Teachers Jessica Held (NIS), Maura Wendelken (CPS) and Kate Merlini (NHS), high school Senior Lily Whelden, NHS Principal Mandy Vasil. This 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, Zona Butler, Steve Sortevik, 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.

The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:00pm. Mrs. Proch requested to amend the agenda to move the Discussion & Votes to Be Taken section directly after Public Comment. A motion was made by Zona Butler, seconded by Tim Lepore and approved by roll call. Steve Sortevik asked to amend the agenda and move the School Committee Self Evaluation to a later date meeting because not every member was in attendance tonight as should be, a motion was made by Zona Butler, seconded by Steve Sortevik and approved by roll call vote. A motion was then made to approve the amended agenda by Steve Sortevik, seconded by Tim Lepore, and which was then approved unanimously by roll call vote. Mrs. Proch welcomed everyone to the Nantucket School Committee meeting and opened Public Comment.

Comments from the Public

Director of ELL, Kellyann Cooney asked to read a letter on behalf of the ILT Committee, the Chair recognized Ms. Cooney who read into the minutes:

To our colleagues on the School Committee:

We have taken the time to reflect, individually and as a group, upon the School Committee meeting that occurred on March 18th, 2021. We appreciate the opportunity both to present our work to the School Committee, and to encourage growth and learning as a part of our educational institution. The work that we are doing is predicated on facing uncomfortable realities and having difficult conversations to ensure equitable opportunities and experiences for all of our students and families. We remain committed to our mission and open to participating in these challenging conversations, as we model a growth mindset for our students. We are willing to embrace the challenges that will support equitable opportunities for all.

Zona: We are grateful for your voice and hope we have truly heard you about your experiences. We hope to honor your perspective by calling to action the teachers, administrators, and community to understand the inequity within our school system. We are committed to the truths of our students and families, both by evaluating the data-driven realities of our successes and failures, and by listening to and holding up the experiences of our BIPOC students, families, and community members. As educators, we must ask the hard questions to learn how we have failed some of our students while pushing others towards excellence. We thank you for your perspective as we engage in this work, and hope that our dedication to making these changes is apparent. We know that if mistakes are made, we will need to face them and work to correct them.

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Jen and Steve, we heard your feedback as well and appreciate the time you have dedicated as School Committee members. In order to best serve our students and families, we would like to ask for clarification on your comments. A comment was made that we as a committee should “be careful” in our work; we respectfully ask the committee or committee member to clarify what we need to be careful about when presenting data gathered within our district. We also ask the committee to clarify the concern that by presenting the experiences of our BIPOC students and families, both with narratives and data, we are not focusing on the needs of all of our students. Certainly, we agree that all of our students deserve a fulfilling, safe, and appropriate educational experience; without specifics about your concerns, we cannot adequately alter or change our course of action. We look forward to your thoughtful and clarifying responses.

Dr. Lepore although we understand you were unable to attend SC the evening of our presentation, we hope that you were able to review our documents on your own time or perhaps view the recording of what was missed. If you have any questions, feedback, or suggestions - please share them with us.

Pauline, as committee chairperson, we would like to draw your attention and the attention of the committee to the following resource. On page 26 of the 2020 Delegate Manual, the Massachusetts Association of School Committees describes a resolution that was approved by the Board of Directors. Resolution 3 describes the School Committee Anti-Racism Resolution, and includes the following statement: “WHEREAS every district will examine their policies for institutional and systemic racialized practices and implement change with sustainable policies that are evidence based”. We look forward to working in tandem with the School Committee in examining our policies for institutional and systemic racialized practices and implementing changes where they are needed.

In response to the feedback of the committee, we hope to support the learning and unlearning necessary to make these changes both within ourselves and the district. We hope to share with you our monthly newsletter and other helpful resources as we endeavor to improve together.

Thank you for your time and consideration

Committee discussion and votes to be taken

Vote to Approve Transfer of Money from Nantucket Agency Account to Nantucket High School Student Activities Account to facilitate balance transfer request of \$25,767.02 for the Class of 2020 Steve Sortevik made a motion to approve the donation, Zona Butler seconded, with no one opposed, the motion was approved.

“On Motion, duly made and seconded, the Nantucket School Committee: approves the balance transfer of \$25,435.67 from the NHS Agency Account to Nantucket Student Activities Account”

Vote to Approve Donation from the Jean F. & David G. Nathan Fund, c/o The Boston Foundation, to NCS Community Pool, \$300.00 Steve Sortevik made a motion to approve the donation, Zona Butler seconded, with no one opposed, the motion was approved.

Vote to Approve March 18, 2021 Meeting Minutes Zona Butler made a motion to approve the minutes, Steve Sortevik seconded, with no one opposed, the motion was approved.

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

Superintendent’s Report

Return to In-Person Learning Update

Dr. Elizabeth Hallett supplied the School Committee with the final draft of the 2021 Spring Reopening Plan/Return to In-Person Learning. This document is a comprehensive narrative to provide clarity and guidance. Governor Baker and Commissioner Riley’s *Return to School* decree announces a 100% return to in-person learning, phased in for grades Prek-5 to start April 5, grades 6-8 to start April 28 and date soon-to-be announced for high school age students. The Commissioner has recommended cancellation for MCAS for 11th graders but with the opportunity to take them in the fall and be eligible for the Abigail Adams Scholarships. Parents will be able to choose 100% in person or 100% remote, and some parents have chosen to for their children to remain in Cohort D, fully remote. The Reopening Plan has been sent to the staff, the families and is available to all public on the NPS website in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. There are some distinctions in the plan for 3-6 foot distances between desks for students, lunch protocols and an Addendum on quarantine and travel specifics. Dr. Hallett thanked the District Leadership Team, the Joint Labor Management Council, NPS teachers and staff for their work in finalizing this plan, and Diane O’Neil, Facilities Director, and her staff, for working so hard to prepare for staff and students. Some new additional positions for lunch/recess monitors have been posted and filled, and buses are almost up to full capacity with all six buses running approximately 300 students - almost equal to regular ridership. The Principals and teachers will be spending the first few days reviewing and impressing the protocols and routines. Dr. Hallett is very happy to welcome people back into school full time!

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District Report Card

Dr. Hallett presented the Annual District Report Card, complete with some updated charts, and thanked Jennifer Rabold for her help in putting the information together. All the material is taken from the Department of Education and this document puts all that detail in one place. Dr. Hallett reminded the information is from the previous year's data (2019-2020) and she has included a link on each page of the report card to offer quick access to the details. Included are four new bullets pertaining to School and District Accountability Information: Access to Broad & Challenging Coursework, Student Attendance and Discipline, High School Outcomes and Post Secondary Enrollment and Finance. One very important component is the lack of Accountability and Percentile ratings as well as MCAS results. Due to the pandemic, these statistics are unavailable because students were not in school, they were remote, and MCAS were not administered in the Spring of 2020.

Enrollment

Superintendent Hallett distributed Enrollment for April 1. A total of 1658, up 8 students from the previous month. She mentioned that 4 of those students were one family who had been homeschooling and now is returning to in person learning. She additionally pointed out there is no comparison of numbers for the month of April 2020 because as of last year, March was when the school experienced immediate closure.

Once finished with her report, the Superintendent had a number of questions posed to her from the School Committee. Zona Butler had a question concerning school closures and how that works if this becomes an issue. She referred to Roberto Santamaria's disagreeing with the School Committee when last these discussions came about for the Fall Plan and hybrid/remote/in person planning. Dr. Hallett reflected there is a COVID response Committee that meets including herself, the NTA, Roberto Santamaria, NCH and others, that have been routinely meeting since last Spring 2020 to discern, discuss and dissect information regarding the pandemic numbers and how these affect the schools learning models. Mrs. Butler asked who is in charge to make the ultimate final decision for hybrid/remote/in-person, Dr. Hallett responded it is ultimately her decision. Mrs. Butler asked these statements to be specifically reflected in the minutes. Steve Sortevik circled back to the District Report Card and was troubled by students absent more than nine days, that the percentage seemed high and is this number higher than before or consistent? Dr. Hallett answered she would check those statistics. He also was interested in the Return to In Person plan and specifically queried the language about the number of COVID-19 cases "threshold" and what is that number. He is worried because "we are in a spike... it is worrisome with the variants now on island." Dr. Hallett assured the School Committee she speaks regularly with Mr. Santamaria and reminded them how the numbers for metrics are old numbers and the population on the island is so much higher than documented. The percentages in school of COVID-19 cases is almost indeterminable and there is no evidence of school spread. Mr. Sortevik further asked the number of students in a class that causes a classroom to close for quarantine. The Superintendent said movement and class size is a factor, and while we have not had to do this as of yet, we might do a whole class if it were necessary. He is also concerned about lunch and the 6ft distance unmasked which makes him further uncomfortable. Dr. Hallett emphasized she will continue to rely on nurses, the COVID Liaison, Mr. Santamaria and everyone will continue to mask, distance and follow protocols as this is working. The final question from Mr. Sortevik pertained to movement of students in their own groupings, or pods. Dr. Hallett stated this happens easily in the NES and NIS schools, but as we move into CPS and NHS, students are mixed in. Mr. Horton, CPS Principal, did contribute by explaining how they have most groups moving together as best they can, but classes mix due to the schedules. Dr. Lepore commented he likes the school report card and said it is revealing to compare it to other districts. Miss Amanda Mack suggested a fix for the lunch distancing issue might be to have ½ the class eat the first part of the period, and switch to the other ½ for the second. The Superintendent agrees to this idea, acknowledged they have considered this plan and it might work. Chair Proch stated it is illuminating to see a percentage rate of 40% for students whose first language is NOT English. She recognizes that our ELL percentage number has always been higher than the state and she is curious if other districts have class sizes of more than 20. Mrs. Proch continued with some observations regarding diversity, their SAT numbers, as well as graduations rates of 4 years vs. 5 years. She would like to 'dig' into the demographics and the 'stories' and directly challenged the School Committee and the School - *she feels there is work to do to decrease the percentages and we can do better.* She complimented the Innovation Pathway program but said this is only one avenue and more opportunities are essential. Zona Butler reiterated her strong conviction concerning more guidance meetings and connecting students earlier than at the high school level. She furthered, no student should fall through cracks and reaching them in the middle school years is imperative for their development.

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Presentations and discussions of interest to the Committee

History of Pandemics – NHS Student Lily Whelden

Miss Whelden thanked the School Committee for the chance to present. She shared how at the beginning of the year she had a hole in her schedule and constructed a course with the help of a teacher to study Early Pandemics. She is going to Skidmore in the Fall 2021 and hopes to continue research on this subject important to her. She began with the Bubonic Plague as the first documented pandemic and reviewed symptoms, the more than 50% mortality rate and comparisons to other sickness'. She described three types of plague: Bubonic, Pneumonic, and Septicemic. She cited some specific examples and focused on a particular one, the Black Death, considered the most deadly Bubonic strain, taking the lives of more than 100 million people. She described similarities between Bubonic Plague and COVID, they both have cited mass hysteria, caused multifaceted health and mental health issues, created confusion and offered little hope for a cure. She affirmed how science has reached new heights, with antibiotics and vaccines and determined one thing that can help overall, the kindness of people and removing judgement. She stated hope is imperative, research can continue, and populations will survive. Miss Whelden shared her site list, including Project Gutenberg, GALE, Google Scholar, and JSTOR. Dr. Lepore mentioned Bubonic plague still exists in California although it is infrequent. Mrs. Butler agreed the end is in sight but there is no room for shame or blame. Principal Vasil lauded Miss Whelden for the courage to do this last step of her project by presenting at the meeting, she needed a big finale, and this was it!

Art Presentation K-12 – Director of Curriculum & Assessment, Humanities Jennifer Rabold, and Art Teachers Jessica Held (NIS), Maura Wendelken (CPS) and Kate Merlini (NHS)

Jennifer Rabold began the presentation referring to DESE regulations that changed dramatically the way that Art could be taught this year. The rules are very stringent about using equipment to limit sharing, creating singular or student limited workstations to maintain pods/cohorts and the cleaning of each station and equipment. She presented the Elementary School portion on behalf of Susan Grant, NES Art Teacher, who was not able to join the Zoom. At NES, Art is 'on a cart' and materials are switched and sterilized between classes. Ms. Grant travels to six (6) classrooms per day and teaches a different grade level per trimester. Her primary goal is to give students the opportunity to safely explore materials and instill a love of creating and appreciating Art, in person and at home (remotely). She talked about using less "messy" materials and ensuring students do have material both in school and home. Some examples were offered to show the artwork. Jessica Held (NIS) while enthusiastic about what she has been able to do, lamented that there is no kiln use or group tables and that she has not been able to use the Art room. This creates 'art on a cart' for her as well, and she also highlighted slowing her pace down to work on projects and focus on wellness, teamwork, respect, identity, activism, risk taking, independent thinking, and connection. She offered multiple examples of drawing, watercolors, painting, mural panels, clay totem poles and talked about how proud she is of their work and how excited she is to be heading back into the Art room with students in the upcoming week. Maura Wendelken (CPS) talked about the major shift for this year with students working individually at a distanced desk, one grade working at a time in the studio. Typically, grades 6-8 are intermingled spending time in the studio throughout the day working on collaborative group projects. Ms. Wendelken is very happy that all students get Art this year even if it is separated. She showed examples of digital books in Schoology, actual sketch book bags each student has for themselves and reviewed some focus areas that are new to this year. She feels it is very important to support social emotional health in various ways, one of them includes many fresh air breaks and she takes her students outside often. She shared some drawings of traditional school projects and students doing their own installations and eagerly awaits returning to the studio with more collaborative opportunities for students. High School Art Teacher Kate Merlini echoed what can and cannot be done in the Art studio and talked about keeping close tabs on her students by giving surveys to get their feedback. She shared some quotes from students who pine for Art class and are so appreciative for that elective saying it is always a welcome break from core curriculum. Ms. Merlini talked about the commitment and importance of art curriculum, providing equitable access and how Art enriches the lives of students. She gave some examples of work and pointed out to the School Committee when the Art program began in NHS there were two teachers and 250 students, now there are over 500 students and still, two teachers who teach 14 different art classes. She emphasized how art can channel self-expression and provide a sense of calm and wellbeing and was excited to reveal five seniors are going to Art School in the fall. She asked to read a statement to the School Committee and emotionally narrated:

"Let me start by saying that I have a most definite implicit bias in favor of the arts. I wholeheartedly believe that we, in the public academic world, routinely underestimate the power of creativity. For our students, the arts provide a means of not only creative expression but that of self expression. A means for students to explore identity and to build self esteem and self empowerment. Creative project-based learning provides students the opportunity to not only problem-solve but to come up with individualized, unique solutions. As tough as this pandemic has been, as an art

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educator I am humbled to have been able to offer our students a means of expression that is individualized, that is equitable and in the case of studio arts is hands-on or, minimizes screen time when screen time has been at a maximum. As an art student at Nantucket public schools, the arts provide a balance to what traditional academics have to offer. Arts classrooms provide open-ended problem solving. The answers are unique to the individual. The arts have the ability to give students a voice where they often don't have one. Consider the power or potential the arts have to help navigate socio-cultural differences and inequities. Our entry level classes create opportunities for our EL and Special Education students to be heard, to have a voice, to have discourse... in other words, to be on equal footing with their peers. The arts are so often overlooked and underutilized as a vehicle to help weave together the fabric of school culture. The arts provide an equal platform for expression and exploration. Whether you are a privileged academic high flyer, a newcomer struggling to learn a new language and adapt to a new culture or if your learning is differently abled. The arts have the potential to benefit ALL students. Nantucket High school has had 2 art teachers since, I believe, it's inception. When we had a school population of 250 students, we had two art teachers. We are now at more than double that, over 500 students and we still have 2 visual arts instructors. It is my understanding that, according to the guidance department, we need more elective offerings for our high school population. In preparation for our presentation today we were given prompts one of which was: 'What are our (professional) hopes and dreams for after the pandemic?' I would say that we hope that the power and potential of what our classes have to offer is acknowledged and utilized by expanding our program and adding an additional staff member, creating more sections and therefore more access to the arts at the high school level. ALL of our students deserve access to this form of enrichment."

The School Committee was impressed by the work and recognized how fortunate the students are to have the teachers who are so passionate and committed to the Art(s). Miss Mack added how glad she is that art is still available in school as it is nice to be able to express oneself and be creative. The Chair thanked the group for making the most of everything possible.

Drop-Out Rate – NHS Principal Mandy Vasil

Mrs. Vasil presented Drop-Out rate information and thanked Technology specialist, Joanne Johnson, for helping to sort out the data collected from DESE. As of June 2020, 533 students were actively enrolled in this high school - seven (7) students reported as dropping out which equates to 1.3% of the total NHS population. Mrs. Vasil broke out some demographics, gender and grade levels of the seven students and told their 'story'. She felt it interesting to note, three of seven left to enter the workforce, two left without notifying the school of next plans, one landed up graduating in Jamaica and one returned to NPS this year. She also gave the dropout numbers for the last ten years and said it was interesting to see the figures are relatively similar year to year, but two years jumped out with ten students leaving school early. She additionally specified movement of numbers in a more general way, depicting students who withdrew early because they moved, or students who arrived late because they transferred into NHS. The Department of Education (DESE) has Blueprint Suggestions for EL Students' Success, and Mrs. Vasil is interested to further review these plans for success and would like to implement them more specifically in NHS. She reviewed the AP statistics (a report she had given earlier in the year) and agreed the number breakdown of white students versus other minorities participating in AP classes is disproportionate to our student population. This is an area we need to reach out to find ways to support students. Mrs. Vasil offered some future plans for outreach.

Dr. Lepore stated he has historically been concerned about latecomers and that they often do not have the support to graduate. Mr. Sortevik opined it is imperative we find ways to encourage students from all groups to grow and take challenges. Miss Mack said the idea of AP classes is sometimes daunting and she thinks feedback from students that are currently enrolled, showing how these goals are attainable, might be helpful to remove some of the trepidation of some students.

Sub-Committee/Work Group

Diversity: Pauline Proch stated she reread the ILT Resolution and would like to discuss Professional Development for the School Committee, perhaps in the Summer as a Workshop. She will be attending a legislative breakfast in the next few weeks regarding public policy, COVID-19 among the topics.

Student Council – Representative Amanda Mack

Miss Mack shared the Student Council is discussing Graduation and possible events for Seniors. Nothing is finalized, they are hopeful for an outdoor full ceremony, they are working on repeating the parade of last year, and the possibility of holding a Senior Ball. Powder Puff will not be resurrected for this year.

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Horizon

For the next meeting, April 15, Veritas will present, as well as ELPAC, SNAC, School Choice Participation will be voted and the discussion of the Superintendent Evaluation timeline. Additionally, the School Committee Self Evaluation report. The next meeting will be April 15, 2021 at 6:30 pm

At 8:04pm the School Committee adjourned on a motion made by Steve Sortevik, seconded by Tim Lepore and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,
Logan O'Connor, School Committee Clerk