

Portland Board of Education

**BOE Regular Meeting
Buck Forman Room
August 10, 2021**

The Portland Board of Education held a Regular Meeting in the Buck Forman Room at 265 Main Street, 2nd Floor, on Tuesday, August 10, 2021. Board members in attendance: Chairwoman S. Peters, M. Scata, L. Steinhauser, T. Lavoy, L. Christensen, and D. Murphy. C. Darby was absent. Also in attendance were Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Charles Britton, Dawn Davis, Eric Martin, Kathryn Lawson, Stephanie Fragola, and members of the public.

Call to Order

S. Peters called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

Approval of Agenda

Motion: To approve the agenda for the August 10, 2021 Board meeting as presented.
Moved by L. Steinhauser, seconded by M. Scata. The motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Consent Agenda

Motion: To approve the consent agenda, including the BOE minutes for the July 13, 2021 Board meeting as presented and Kaitlyn Douglas' leave of absence request for the 2021-2022 school year, for the August 10, 2021 Board meeting as presented.
Moved by T. Lavoy, seconded by M. Scata. The motion passed unanimously.

Audience of Citizens

No report

Student Representative Report

No report

Communications and Updates

Superintendent's Report

2021-2022 School Reopening Update

Letters of Resignation were received by Dr. Britton for the following individuals: Wall View Physical Education teacher Ryan Guertin, Middle School English teacher Fylicia D'Angelo, Middle School Spanish teacher Catherine Beck, Valley View Pre-Kindergarten teacher Stephanie Hall, High School French teacher Emily Sullivan, Middle School Paraprofessional Moesha Turner, High School Life Skills Special Education teacher Lisa Bouchard, and Gildersleeve Fourth Grade teacher Kelsey Ott. Dr. Britton expressed his gratitude for their work in Portland and wished all individuals well on their new endeavors both in and out of the field of education.

Dr. Britton addressed T. Lavoy's request for an analysis of why teachers are leaving Portland. Dr. Britton gave a brief 4-year lookback at the number of teachers leaving the district per year. He shared that 10-12% of teachers leave the district for various reasons per year, about 13-16 per year. T. Lavoy presented that exit interviews be conducted to see why teachers are leaving. Dr. Britton confirmed that those interviews are happening with each individual.

Dr. Britton shared the memorandum of agreement that he has been negotiating with Sue McDougall and the teachers union. This agreement adjusts the list stipend positions in the district as they are not currently in the contract, inclusive of the two GSA Coordinators, Flex period support for new Middle and High School schedules, two new Social Media Coordinators, the Equity Coordinators, and a Girls' Volleyball coach, and Assistant cross-country coach. He shared that the SRBI coordinators, one greenhouse coordinator, a diversity coordinator, and the assistant wrestling coach and softball coach positions are not returning.

Dr. Britton shared that, unfortunately, COVID numbers are increasing again. He is optimistic about the fact that Portland has the highest vaccinated population in Chatham Health District, coming in at 70% of the eligible population being vaccinated. He shared current CDC guidelines for the upcoming school year and what our expectations will be of faculty, staff, and students in the district. He overviewed mask guidance from the CDC that states that all individuals must wear masks in schools and public transportation, including school buses. The guidance is set to expire on September 30th, at which point he assumes new guidance will be issued but we will follow current guidance until that time.

Dr. Britton announced that Portland will not be cohorting, but will be maintaining 3 feet distance between students to the maximum extent possible. Dr. Britton shared that the CDC is offering voluntary testing to public K-6 students via a mobile surveillance testing unit. He will have more information for the Board in September. He does not have enough information to make an informed recommendation on whether or not we should move forward with this at this time. Dr. Britton addressed the issue that most of our schools do not have centralized air for improvement of circulation of air. In regards to cleaning, the CDC recommends reverting back to regular scheduled cleaning is all that is needed of school buildings with no additional cleaning necessary, with no Wednesday closures. Vaccinated students and staff, additionally, no longer need to quarantine if they are asymptomatic. Lunch waves are still going to be happening. Gildersleeve is going to have lunch in the classroom, but all other schools will be using the cafeteria and the gymnasium for lunches to maximize distance between students. Assigned seating on the school buses are encouraged but not required. Dr. Britton shared that fall athletics are a green light, including football. All visitors should be aware of and comply with mitigation strategies used in the district.

M. Scata and S. Peters expressed concern for student safety and wondered how we would know who is vaccinated. Dr. Britton affirmed that the contact tracing protocol will still occur with these new guidelines. L. Steinhauser expressed concern that the guidance is a few weeks old with new variants arising and vaccinated individuals are testing positive. L. Steinhauser asked Dr. Britton if he thought that the guidance was going to change based on recent COVID-19

events. M. Scata expressed concern on clarity of the guidelines, and requested that changes be made in our mask policies if the guidance changes. D. Davis stated that the nursing staff will have an addenda from the DPH available to them to ensure the clarity of what to do if a situation arises. Dr. Britton stated that he will keep the Board updated of any changes to the guidance. The re-opening committee will meet this week to discuss procedures after the final plan is released.

School Improvement Grant

Eric Martin and Ryan Walstrom presented the school improvement grant. Ryan Walstrom shared that Gildersleeve was designated a focus school last year because of the discrepancy in the students with high needs with all students for the past three years in both reading and math. Gildersleeve received three hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$350,000) in grant funds for the next 4 years, totaling \$1.4 million. Eric Martin expressed gratitude for Ryan for identifying the needs of his students and expressing the ways that his students could benefit from the grant.

Ryan shared that they are going to be hiring several individuals with the funds to enhance and enrich our math and reading intervention, professional development, and intervention kits in Gildersleeve. M. Scata asked if they are going to use the Readers Workshop model, and Ryan affirmed that they will use Readers Workshop along with the new intervention to stay in alignment with Valley View and Brownstone.

Facilities Update

Gas Leak

Carl Johnson shared that it is an ongoing process to repair by PerfectTemp, our HVAC company. The building inspector passed and signed off on 5 areas of the Middle School and High School yesterday. He is optimistic that we will be in good shape for the start of the school year. He hopes that he will have more information at the beginning of next week to communicate with Dr. Britton.

M. Scata asked if there is a contingency plan if the schools are not ready to be reopened in the next few weeks. Dr. Britton stresses that we stay optimistic for now, but says that we will delay the first day of school if necessary. D. Murphy asks if the work being done at our extent or if the gas company will be taking responsibility, as well as how much it will be. Carl responded that the responsibility of the repairs will be on us, and he does not know how much it will cost until they are done.

Summer Projects

Carl Johnson shared that all of the schools have had security updates performed, completed, and tested. He shared that the energy lighting replacement at VV and BIS is complete. The pipe installation is complete at BIS and almost done at VV. The steam trap replacement will most likely start in September and happen at night so they will not affect instruction.

There are a small number of projects that need to be completed but have been put on hold because of the lack of contractors.

Director of Students Services

Dawn Davis shared that there were 36 paraprofessionals assigned to special education in December 2020. In July 2021, it was found that Portland needed funding for 6 additional paraprofessionals to properly support all students. There has been a reduction in outplaced costs by \$164,000 in salary alone. Dawn shared that the addition of 6 paraprofessionals would cost \$142,248.00 in the salary line. The positions were posted in July and all positions were filled with high quality candidates. Dr. Britton is conducting final interviews with paraprofessionals this week. D. Murphy asked if the \$142,248.00 is purely salary or if it included benefits. Dawn stated that the number was purely salary. D. Murphy expressed his concern for adding so many staff members this year and feels the district will be overstaffed, and the taxpayers will face the brunt of that financial increase. S. Peters stated that the paraprofessionals are required by the IEP plans for the students, so it was needed to hire these staff members. Dr. Britton shared that Dawn stated where the resources are available to offset the costs of the increase in staffing.

Stephanie Fragola states that we should be okay in the certified staff line items as well as uncertified. She states that we are in a great position in terms of the salary budget. We are also spot-on in terms of the classified line item. Dawn had a savings of \$298,542 inclusive of transportation, salary, benefits, etc. and with the addition of the paraprofessionals, we should be in good shape.

Dawn shared that the American Rescue Plan has been approved to trickle down through the IDEA grant funding to support the reentry of all students into public schools. She does not know what that number is or when it will be coming to the district but the finance directors are going to additional training in September to find out more about the funding.

Dawn recognized all the staff that made ESY (Extended School Year) successful this summer, as it came to a close at the end of July. She stated that there is only one position that is not filled yet, for which there is an interim plan in place. She shared that Eric Martin and her ensured that the staff had plenty of curriculum writing hours available.

New Business

Girls Volleyball Proposal

Kathryn Lawson proposed that this girls volleyball team is a student-driven proposal. A student went to her and asked what it would take to start a volleyball program for current grades 9-12. There are 23 interested students and 21 of those students are new fall athletes, making that an increase of student activity. Kathryn worked with Jennifer Bell, the athletic coordinator, to make it an intramural Junior Varsity program. There will only be away games this year. She stated that they will use the assistant softball coaching stipend to fund the volleyball coach position.

D. Murphy asked what the funds are that would be needed for the volleyball program next year. Kathryn shared that several pieces of equipment are needed for us to be ready to host home games and tournaments.

M. Scata asked how many away games will be played. Jennifer Bell, Athletic Coordinator, shared that 12 away games will be played dependent upon the meeting next week with the CIAC for COVID restrictions as well as how many of the league teams.

T. Lavoy asked to see the differences in the boys sports versus the girls sports and if it is uneven. He also asked if the softball stipend will come back next year or if the elimination is permanent. Kathryn stated that the softball team didn't have enough interest from the Portland students and merged with East Hampton. Kathryn suspects that the merger with East Hampton will continue for the upcoming year. Jennifer Bell answered that the volleyball team would balance out the current uneven gender count of our sports teams.

Motion: To establish the girls volleyball team proposed by Kathryn Lawson and Jennifer Bell. Moved by M. Scata, seconded by L. Steinhauser. The motion passed unanimously.

2021-2022 Board of Education Goals

Dr. Britton shared the goals that the leadership team embraces fully, and hopes that the Board of Education will embrace them as well. Dr. Britton and Eric Martin went through the goals in detail and how they align with our Vision of the Graduate, and the work of the Equity Coalition. Members of the board asked follow-up questions which were addressed by Eric and Dr. Britton.

T. Lavoy wanted to thank Charles and Eric for their thoughts and their commitment to our students.

Motion: To accept the 2021-2022 Board of Education goals as presented. Moved by M. Scata, seconded by L. Steinhauser. The motion passed unanimously.

Old Business

Portland High School Track Update

Dr. Britton stated that there is no update for the track as of yet. Dr. Britton also shared that he and Eric Martin are pursuing potential reimbursement for the Chromebook leasing for a total of \$210,000. Dr. Britton stated that those funds, if received, could potentially be used to start the track funds and have the track be the number one budget priority in the next budget season in the capital fund. Dr. Britton shared that he is ready to move forward once funding becomes available.

Steering Facilities Committee

RFP for OPM

Dr. Britton shared that there are half a year's worth of meeting dates identified. The Steering Facilities Committee wants to publish an RFP (Request for Proposal) to secure an Operations Project Manager who will come in and work with us to understand what we need to do to get to a bonding referendum and move forward with all of the projects.

Motion: To accept the Steering Facilities Committee's RFP for the 2022-01 specifications as presented.

Moved by M. Scata, seconded by D. Murphy. The motion passed unanimously.

Committee Reports

Curriculum

No report.

Policy

Meeting tomorrow, August 11th, 2021 at 4:00 PM.

Personnel

Moving forward with contract negotiations with teachers and administrators. Suggests that the policy subcommittee get together and address concerns about how the positions are being funded with grants and how to address them moving forward.

Buildings and Grounds

No report.

Conservation and Renewable Task Force

A brief conversation took place regarding solar panel installation on Brownstone. There was a delay on getting some of the panels which will delay the installation by a few months,

CREC Liaison

Great discussion on critical race theory. CREC shared what they are doing in their magnet schools. More information to come after the second part of the discussion continues in the next meeting.

Selectmen Liaison

Discussion about smoking and vaping, and updated language on the policy about smoking on town properties to be inclusive of vaping.

Task Force on Solidarity Liaison

First organized meeting is September 14th at 6:00 PM. Gave a final report on the Board of Selectmen on what they have accomplished in the last year.

Equity and Inclusion Coalition Liaison

No report.

Audience of Citizens

No report.

BOE Comments

No report.

Motion made to enter Executive Session at 9:34 pm for the purpose of discussing the Superintendent of School Evaluation and Board of Education Self Evaluation

Moved by M. Scata, seconded by L. Steinhauser. Passed Unanimously

Motion made to return to Regular Meeting at 9:51 PM

Moved by M. Scata seconded by L. Steinhauser Passed unanimously

Motion to adjourn at 9:54PM

Moved by M. Scata seconded by T. Lavoy Passed unanimously

Respectfully submitted,
Elliot McBride, Board Recording Clerk

Draft minutes until approved at the next Board of Education Regular Meeting