

Carlisle School Committee

Minutes

Monday, August 10, 2020

7:00 p.m.

Remote Meeting Via Zoom

Present Via Zoom – School Committee: Christine Lear - Chair, Amanda Comperchio, Jack Huntress, Eva Mostoufi, Sara Wilson.

Present Via Zoom – School Administration: James O’Shea, Superintendent; Matt Mehler, Middle School Principal; Lori Bruce, Director of Student Support Services; Anne Mahan, Business Manager; Rob Fortado, Supervisor of Buildings and Grounds; Nancy Anderson, Assistant to the Superintendent.

Note: Per Governor Baker’s order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A sec. 20, the public was not allowed to physically access this School Committee meeting. Members of the Public were able to access this meeting via live stream at:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84021026757?pwd=QktTWFM1MGhTd2JxTmN3VE1iS3BEUT09>

Meeting ID: 840 2102 6757

Passcode: uZ.8@4

Public comments were posted via the chat box. Questions/Comments were read and answered by the School Committee via live stream.

I. Call to Order

Ms. Lear called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. Ms. Lear stated that the meeting was being recorded.

II. Information/Discussion Items

- A. School Reopening Discussion. Mr. O’Shea shared that there was a faculty meeting last Thursday, at which it was voiced that the proposed hybrid model did not provide as much instruction as the faculty would like. Mr. O’Shea asked Ms. Vanaria to work with the faculty to modify the draft plans; both hybrid and remote. Mr. O’Shea has also heard from parents who shared their thoughts on the models. Ms. Bruce and Dr. Sidell held a Curriculum working group meeting and generated some new ideas. We are in the process of identifying the best approach to reopening schools. Over the weekend, we developed a survey and sent it to families. A main purpose was to identify which families were choosing Family Choice Remote (FCR). The State charged us with developing three reopening plans but also charged us with educating families that choose FCR. We need to identify and allocate resources to that model. The Administrative Team will meet this week to discuss details. We want to come with a plan and approach that work best for students, families, staff and faculty. Ms. Wilson shared a phrase she heard used about the current climate; this is not an on /off switch,

it's a thermostat; we have to adjust. Can we stage things gradually and keep reevaluating our best practices? Mr. Huntress agreed; even the plans we form today still have to continue to evolve. He asked Mr. O'Shea to share the School Reopening frameworks. Mr. O'Shea said that though the state has created deadlines, our plans are fluid. Ms. Lear spoke to low Carlisle COVID numbers and low student numbers. Ms. Wilson said Carlisle is a leader, we need to constantly check with our community, and she encouraged us to consider a slow reopening. Mr. Huntress added that if there is a slow roll opening, we still need a framework; we have to know when and under what conditions we move to another model. Mr. O'Shea said that if we have a slow approach, we can assess as we go with a smaller number of students. Mr. O'Shea shared the draft operating frameworks that can guide the decision making of the school to move to different models depending on how many cases are in Carlisle and Massachusetts. Ms. Comperchio said with a slow approach to school re-entry, the framework may have to be adjusted. Ms. Lear concurred. Ms. Comperchio added that we will know how children are handling school and routines. Ms. Wilson clarified that we haven't made any determination on what a "slow roll" would be. Her idea is to start with a limited amount of people for ½ day. This would eliminate many issues including lunch, crowds in hallways, and teachers visiting classrooms. All acknowledged that teachers and parents are anxious and it's important for everyone to understand the plan. People agreed that the model should be assessed every couple of weeks, and then follow the frameworks for switching models if necessary. Mr. O'Shea said there are a group of faculty not only looking at the hybrid model, but looking at differentiating between elementary and middle school. Mr. Huntress has been focused on working on a safe and agreeable path forward. He considers Carlisle teachers his friends and understands how much they have done for his children. He knows when our teachers are happy, our students are happy. He is also in full support of in-person learning. The framework tells us when to not be in school. It's great to see the teachers working on the hybrid model and he would like to see increased learning time on that plan. He also knows the downside of remote learning. Ms. Lear said we should have a vote on Friday. Linda Vanaria was recognized and shared the following statement:

Good Evening, thank you for this opportunity to speak to our community.

My name is Linda Vanaria, I am a second grade teacher and I am the president of the Carlisle Teachers' Association. I share this, as I am sure there are some of you who don't know me.

I am here this evening as it is time to share how not only our members are feeling, but how many of our staff are feeling about resuming school.

First, you must know every member of the Carlisle School Staff, has missed our students dearly. We all loved seeing so many of our families at our two parades. We adore your children, we are so grateful for your support, and we cannot wait for the day when we are able to return to our building without the constant fear of this horrific virus.

I think it's safe to say that every one of us is frightened beyond words can describe. We worry for your children and your families, your infants, and your parents, we worry for our colleagues, we worry for our own children, our spouses, and our parents. We worry about our dear cancer survivors and current patients and what one case coming into our school could mean for our community.

Many of us came to school last week to see our beautiful classrooms spaced to follow the 6-foot safety guideline. We saw barren Kindergarten rooms and desks pushed to the limits of the four

corners of each room. To try and bring every student back under these conditions will be challenging and create a difficult educational environment for our students.

We've heard comments about the 6 ft. guideline and the suggestion that teachers can work with a child at their desk as long as it's less than 15 minutes and both have their masks on. There are no guarantees about these statements and the consequences are unacceptable.

Thankfully in Carlisle the Covid-19 positive cases have been very low. But, if we have just a single case enter a classroom that entire class would need to isolate for 14 days, in homes with babies and/or senior citizens. The fear and emotional impact of that quarantine period on those students, staff and their families is immeasurable.

On Thursday, March 12 we were told students would not be coming to school on Friday. We gathered as a staff on Friday the 13th and worked together to go online for Monday. When we were all faced with suddenly teaching remotely and trying to accommodate the needs of all of our learners we did what we always do, we worked for hours to deliver the best remote educational services we could. We know it was not the same as in-person and we know that there were flaws and we've had time to reflect on our crisis teaching and we know what we need to do to adjust our teaching.

We have teams of staff working on what delivering our curriculum and instruction will look like in a full remote model. We also have teams of faculty working on how to deliver a strong hybrid/in-home model. Whatever model we are teaching in, we will always instruct our students in the same excellent Carlisle Way that you are familiar with.

I understand what I am about to say next may not be very popular, and I am so sorry to upset our families. But, I must urge our School Committee to strongly consider starting our school year remotely. I am grateful for the extra 10 days that have been provided to us to continue planning our curriculum, I am hoping we can use part of those 10 days to have our students and their family come to school, meet with us and see the classroom they will come to eventually. Of course we want our new students to have an opportunity to see us and feel comfortable with their new teachers. Of course, we will evaluate how this model is working and what the conditions are for Carlisle and the state. Of course we will have a plan ready should we be able to come back following that evaluation. Of course, we would like nothing more than to be with your children, when it is safe to do so.

As a former 9-year member of the Bedford School Committee, I sympathize with the decision in front of you. I was Chair of the School Committee on September 11th. Every decision that I made that year was with the safety of our students and staff as my first consideration.

Thank you for allowing me to speak with you tonight.

Mr. O'Shea and Ms. Lear thanked Ms. Vanaria for her statement; acknowledging that everyone has anxiety. Ms. Mostoufi asked if there any procedures that administration has omitted for teachers to feel safe. Ms. Vanaria answered no; she understands people are trying to do what they think is best. She added that seeing the classrooms set up with placement of desks with distancing "left a hole in many of us." She understands that the school is buying supplies to be outside but recognized that people can't be outside all the time. Ms. Mostoufi asked what would make teachers comfortable and Ms. Vanaria answered that as far as a metric or benchmark, one person with COVID would set off 15-20 people who have been exposed under some conditions. Mr. Huntress asked if there a number or threshold that has been discussed when teachers would support in person learning. Ms. Vanaria has not polled the membership for a number and would not speak for the members. Though Carlisle has good numbers now, Mr. Huntress said we could

have cases in Massachusetts for 2-3 years; and that incapacitates our ability to achieve as educators. Ms. Vanaria said 2 weeks ago, we had a certain number in Carlisle and that number changed. If we had been in school, there was a possibility that the sickness would have spread. She is requesting we consider starting remotely and evaluating where we are in October; where are the numbers and what are we all feeling. Ms. Mostoufi said parents can't wait until October, they have to plan now. Ms. Vanaria said teachers also have to plan; this is a difficult situation for teachers as well. She said that community members are calling staff to come teach their children at home. Ms. Vanaria added that teachers are prepared to teach under any model; and to suggest teachers can't teach remotely is not accurate. Ms. Mostoufi said someone has to be there to help the young children. Mr. Huntress added that you need a body to watch the kids, shepherd them through, hand them materials. While he has an incredible Zoom tolerance, 2 hours a day is too much for his kids. Only so much instruction can be done remotely. Don't take it that teachers can't deliver awesome instruction, but the young children need help. Ms. Lear added that the teachers love our children, children love our teachers. We want to reopen in the safest way possible. It was decided that the next CSC meeting would be on Monday, August 17 at 7:30. Shaunna Simek was recognized. As a single working mom, she said that it is an understatement to say the instruction in the spring was a challenge. She applauded everyone, but it didn't work in her house at all. Her kids suffered, they didn't get extra help. She said that the Administration has exceeded state guidelines to reopen. She added our goal is to reopen, not to have the best remote learning in the state. If we don't start open, she didn't know how her kids would develop a bond with their teachers. Our community is small, our rates are low. I appreciate teachers are apprehensive. My kids have been wearing masks at camp for 8 weeks, it is their new normal. She also questioned why parents who have decided to home school are voicing opinions on the decision to reopen. Carrie Patel, 85 Tophet, was recognized and asked what options our teachers have who are not comfortable coming back and what is the plan to replace teachers who leave or retire early. As a family that is keeping kids home in the fall, she noted that she speaks up because it will affect her family if someone in the community dies. Mr. O'Shea said that work is being done on leave options for educators based on FMLA acts and COVID acts, the School is working with the CTA on a MOA to allow faculty to take unpaid leave for a year. The School will advertise for long term subs and bring great teachers into the building. Glen Patashnick, 145 Indian Hill Road, asked what testing is required for students and teachers before they come to school. How many cases are in Carlisle now. He wants his kids to have a good education; and added remote is not ideal. Rui Ma agreed with Ms. Vanaria that this is a dangerous and infectious disease. We have to be careful. We want to provide the best experience possible for students. Kim Boschi, 147 Laurelwood, and her husband were recognized. They asked when will the School will share the Family Choice Remote (FCR) education model and information, and also when the deadline is for parents to decide on FCR. Mr. O'Shea answered that we will have dedicated faculty to the FCR model, and will work to develop it in the next several days. In terms of the deadline for a decision, Mr. O'Shea noted that fewer students impact the classroom planning and set-up. He hopes to ask that people make a commitment in FCR for the first trimester, and tell the School the decision in a week to a week and a half. If people choose in-person and they decided to switch out, they can switch out easier to FCR. Soni Best, East Street, appreciates people

choosing remote because she would like in-person education and it will be spaced more optimally with fewer students. David Model is in favor of soliciting help from the Town (BOS, BOH) to enable a dialog in having a school reopening decision and establishing if testing is needed. He felt Carlisle could do its own testing. He closed by asking what is more important than getting children the best educational product we can. Angela Richardson, 123 West Street feels that opening the school will increase transmission and spread the virus. She applauds the school's efforts, yet she worries about students in younger grades, and is concerned about not having the staff to manage the situation. She acknowledged Carlisle has the lowest amount of disease in the country, but she sees numbers going up. She feels we ask a lot of our teachers, but asking them to risk their physical and mental health is not what they signed up for. She is prepared to take her child out and quit her job if necessary to keep everyone safe. The right decision is to keep kids home. Yuan Li was recognized and asked if the school has ways to monitor the quality of remote teaching. Some teachers' classes were more meaningful than others in the spring. She also asked if the school is holding parents to their responses on the survey. Mr. O'Shea said the survey asked for impressions but not a commitment to a particular model. In answer to evaluating remote instruction, the administration was monitoring it last spring, but for the fall, the teacher evaluation program will be in place again. It will be decided what aspects of remote learning will look different, and administrators will observe lessons and give feedback, as they always do, to help teachers modify their practices to benefit the children. Jed Weinstock said he is relatively new to Carlisle and proud to be part of this community. So much is unknown now, nobody knows anything concrete about reopening schools. He said from a game theory perspective, the winning strategy is to go remote and see how things play out for other districts. We need a great remote program. If school needs to shut down, we need to have that in place anyway. He felt the next phase for reopening should be for kids K-4 and kids on IEPs. Kathy MacDonald gave heartfelt thanks to everyone who is doing all they can to get children back to school safely. She sees the need for a great remote program. Jaime Wight, 491 South Street, asked, as a single working mom with a daughter going into 1st grade, if there was feedback from the summer program. She added that her daughter has done great with her mask, and has had a productive summer. Mr. O'Shea answered that Ms. Marshall, a teacher at the Summer Program, presented her experiences at the CSC meeting last week. Mr. O'Shea had a sense of middle school students' positive experiences. He also heard from teachers who worked with younger students, and there was a variety of experiences. Many saw challenges but also saw benefits to seeing kids in person. Ms. Vanaria added that for the youngest learners, it was wonderful for them to be there, but difficult for them to wear masks. She added that if a child fell or needed help, it was hard to think of teachers not going over to children in distress. She said that happened during summer school. She felt middle school students were separated and understood their roles, but younger kids struggled. We are hopeful we can get back, but right now it is not safe in many people's opinions. Catherine Fink said her family has been in the District for 15 years. Speaking as a scientist with a career in infectious disease test development, her opinion is the health and safety of our staff and students is at risk in bringing everyone back to school. She has seen spikes in kids returning. If we do testing and find out that a number of our 750 people are asymptomatic, what is done then? Our teachers know how to teach, at what point are we

going to give our teachers a decision? Rob Misek said when dealing with a crisis, you have to pick one thing that's important. It seems we should be optimizing for safety. Almudena Pacheco-Garcia spoke as the parent of a new student in first grade. She asked if we go remote, because she works, she would like to have the best possible communication from teachers for the minimum requirements each week. Parents will need support to do the work with the children. Mr. Huntress asked how do you increase the tolerance of children to take in more remote learning, and asked what was the thought was of teachers teaching from their classrooms. Ms. Vanaria answered that we would be bringing back over 100 teachers with shared bathrooms and a terrible HVAC system. Teachers want to come back safely but their level of comfort is not great. Ms. Lear added that when you have 180 people it speaks to the amount of passion we have about doing the right things for our students, families and faculty. The decisions we make will impact many households. The CSC is definitely listening. She thanked people for their input. Ms. Wilson said she heard a lot of comments that there wasn't focus on the remote plan, and we need a robust plan. Learning this year is not going to be what it was before. Our kids may not reach benchmarks, but our kids will learn. By watching us and how we work together, we will all learn to adapt. Jennifer Hubbard appreciates how long the CSC and Mr. O'Shea are taking to make this decision. As a dual working parent family too, they had a difficult time in the spring. She would agree that the remote program needs to be more robust, but also in such a plan, you are putting a lot more demands on the working parents. We are required to go to work. I understand teachers have concerns on their own safety. I believe it's a balance. The government, the CDC, the American Association of Pediatrics, are all saying it is safe to go back to school. I sent my kids to summer camp this year for a week and they did great. We should consider the precedent we set if kids don't go back. We've implemented what we need to send kids back and parents have the option to keep kids home. Ms. Lear asked that others contact the CSC with other comments.

III. Action Items.

There were no action items.

IV. Public Comments

Public comments were addressed earlier in the meeting.

V. Adjourn Meeting

Ms. Comperchio made a motion to adjourn the meeting; Ms. Wilson seconded the motion. The following votes were taken in Roll Call: Comperchio, aye; Huntress, aye; Lear, aye; Mostoufi, aye; Wilson, aye. The public meeting was adjourned at 9:29 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Nancy Anderson
Assistant to the Superintendent