

DUDLEY-CHARLTON REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Special Meeting

Approved minutes of the special meeting of the Dudley-Charlton Regional School Committee held Wednesday, December 30, 2020 at 7 p.m. via live stream:

Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/dcrsd>
<https://vimeo.com/494142926>

Video Conferencing - Zoom:
<https://zoom.us/j/92486648664>

Attending the school committee remotely were:

Kenneth J. Laferriere, Chair
Pauline J. Aucoin, Vice Chair
Cathleen Carmignani
Jordan W. Evans
Catherine M. Kabala
Stephanie A. Reed
Jamie L. Terry
Michaela Cluett, Student Representative

Also in attendance were Steven M. Lamarche, Superintendent of Schools, Richard J. Mathieu, Director of Finance and Operations, Brian J. Ackerman, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning; district administrators Lorinda C. Allen, William F. Chaplin, Daniel D’Arcangelo, Jennifer A. Desto, Lori A. Pacheco, Dean W. Packard, Kathleen E. Pastore, Christopher E. Starczewski, Andrew Leach, Michael Tucker, Peter Olson, Michael Resener, Kelly True, Nicole Heroux; Boards of Health members James Philbrook, Kathleen Walker, Jon Sanborn of Charlton; Lorri Ducharme, Jennifer Cournoyer, Dudley, 99 attendees via Vimeo, Richard Earle, moderator, and Sandra Sullivan, secretary.

I. Call to Order

The chair called the meeting to order at 7:04 PM.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

III. Moment of Silence

IV. Citizens’ Forum

Derek Donohue, Dudley, questioned the boards of health proposal for a two-week recess from in-person learning. He cited students’ cooperation with the mitigating measures and Superintendent Lamarche’s statement that there has been no in-school spread of the virus. Mr. Donahue further cited statements by the governor and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education that the safest place for kids is in school.

V. Communications

Members reported receiving multiple communications concerning the recommendation of the boards of health for a two-week recess.

**Minutes of the School Committee
Meeting of Wednesday, December 30, 2020**

VI. New Business

A. Dudley/Charlton Boards of Health Letter of Recommendation the School Committee

Mr. Lamarche said we are in a divided arena as the board considers the recommendation by the joint boards of health to take a two-week recess from in-person learning beginning January 4, 2021. Mr. Lamarche recommended the district return to school in the current hybrid model, saying the mitigating strategies and the communication strategies are working. The district has required a 14-day quarantine for Covid-19 cases, which is well above recommendations. Throughout, the district continues to affirm the importance of students' social-emotional wellness.

Mr. Lamarche said he is not dismissing the boards of health recommendations, as he also proposed a suspension or pause of all athletics, show choir and band activities until January 19. Using Federal COVID-19 aid, the district will propose the hiring of a COVID-19 coordinator at the school committee's scheduled special meeting of Wednesday, January 6.

Mr. Lamarche said he will implement any course of action as directed by the committee with fidelity.

The chair opened the floor for deliberations.

Mrs. Terry asked the chair to allow the boards of health to explain their recommendation.

Jennifer Cournoyer – Chair, Dudley Board of Health: Ms. Cournoyer said the board agrees that children need to be in school, and this was not an easy decision to make. Ms. Cournoyer said the board is asking for two weeks of remote learning as staff and students return from the holiday break, and to allow for any quarantines that may cause multiple absences among staff. The recess would also help stop the spread. Ms. Cournoyer said restaurants and dance schools have closed, and the Town Hall is staffed in two groups, one remote, one in person.

Mrs. Reed cited information shared last week by Gov. Charlie Baker that towns and schools in red should continue to have in person learning. There is no data to show that schools are the transmission sites. Mrs. Reed said the school committee needs to continue its efforts to get kids back in school full time. She said the letter from the boards of health is a recommendation, not a mandate.

Miss Evans thanked the boards, and agreed that it is important to get kids back to school. She said social emotional well-being is a key component of her term on the committee, but agreed that the health board's presentation makes sense.

Mrs. Terry asked whether the district is experiencing difficulty in finding substitutes. Mr. Lamarche said is it no more difficult than in past years.

Mrs. Aucoin stated she fully supports the boards' recommendation.

Ms. Cournoyer said it is likely that families gathered over the Christmas break, similar to Thanksgiving when the towns saw spikes and surges. She said there have been increases since October, some among school aged children.

**Minutes of the School Committee
Meeting of Wednesday, December 30, 2020**

Charlton Board of Health Agent James Philbrook agreed said there were a few cases among college students in Charlton at Thanksgiving.

Mrs. Pastore said district administrators review Covid-19 data each week and rely on it for all decisions. She reiterated the statement by DESE that school is the safest place for kids right now, not only for social emotional reasons, and urged the committee to keep the doors open to this safe place.

Mr. Laferriere said it would be a mistake to go fully remote, saying data proves there are no cases of transmission in the schools.

Mrs. Walker cited data from December 10-21 showing 88 cases in Charlton. While none of the cases were found to be as a result of exposure in school, Mrs. Walker said there could be more cases since Christmas, and said the recess would allow a time to prevent transmission from those who have not followed the rules.

Mrs. Allen said school nurses have tracked cases in the school district since school returned to in person hybrid learning on September 16. Of those, 19 students were attending school in person, others were fully remote or out of school for a period of time.

Mrs. True expressed concern about the effect of the two-week recess on those students who do not engage during remote learning. She said that is a significant population at Dudley Elementary School. These are Cohort C students who can be in school four days per week and don't have the number of opportunities for remote. She said those students would lose significant time in addition to their existing setbacks and challenges.

Mrs. Allen agreed it is extremely difficult to provide remote services to special education students.

Dr. Ackerman said the district's lower income students need that direct teacher contact, and this gap is exacerbated over time

Mr. Lamarche said if the committee does vote to go remote, he will request to amend the district calendar by moving the professional development date scheduled for January 29 to January 4 as staff needs time to develop this two-week plan. Also, the district has until January 19 to develop a plan to meet Student Learning Time requirements.

Miss Cluett expressed concern about the change in student routines. She noted the time needed for staff to create lessons, and asked how much change is good for a student at this age.

Mr. Philbrook said the pause on after school activities is a solution, and allows the proper concentration on in-school activities, and for delivery of school meals.

Mr. Lamarche said in-school mitigating strategies are working as less than 1% of student population has been affected. The home is the contagion zone, the core dynamic, and with a two-week recess, students would be in this situation. He said moving to fully remote is a monumental decision – a heavy lift for students and staff.

**Minutes of the School Committee
Meeting of Wednesday, December 30, 2020**

The chair noted there is no motion needed if the committee's intent is to remain in the hybrid model. No motion was made.

VII. Next Meeting Dates

Special School Committee Meeting: Wednesday, January 6, 2021 7:00 PM

School Committee Meeting: Wednesday, January 13, 2021 7:00 PM

Budget and Finance Subcommittee: Tuesday, January 12, 2021, 4:00 PM

Policy Review Subcommittee: TBD

Curriculum Subcommittee for Teaching and Learning: TBD

Capital Outlay/Safety Subcommittee: Friday, January 8, 2021, 10:00 AM

VIII. Future Agenda Items: Update HVAC, Update Fiscal Year 2021, Update Equity Committee, Update Plan Transitions, Update Student Services Department, Superintendent's Award of Academic Excellence (January), SHRHS Principal's Award (January), Fiscal Year 2022 (January)

IX. Adjourn

A motion by S. Reed, second by J. Evans to adjourn the meeting was approved by unanimous roll call vote at 8:48 PM.

C. Carmignani: yes

J. Evans: yes

C. Kabala: yes

S. Reed: yes

J. Terry: yes

P. Aucoin: yes

K. Laferriere: yes