



CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

(Official Minutes)

Virtual Special Meeting

July 14, 2020

Called for 5:00 p.m. broadcast from the Media Arts Studio, 454 Broadway, Cambridge, for the purpose of discussing CPSD's three learning models for school re-openings in the fall: 1) an in-person model with safety-requirements, 2) a hybrid model, and 3) a completely remote model and voting on School Committee Motion #20-149.

Members Present: Vice Chair Bowman, Member Fantini, Member Rachel, Member Rojas, Member Weinstein, Member Wilson, Mayor Siddiqui

Also Present: Dr. Salim, Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Turk, Deputy Superintendent of Schools

Mayor Siddiqui in the Chair

A quorum of the School Committee being present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

The Chair read the call of the meeting and explained that this meeting is being televised, votes will be taken and there will be public comment.

The meeting proceeded to the first order of business for the purpose of a sound check with the following roll call: Member Rachel PRESENT; Member Weinstein PRESENT; Member Wilson PRESENT; Vice Chair Bowman PRESENT; Member Fantini PRESENT; Member Rojas PRESENT; Mayor Siddiqui PRESENT.

Mayor Siddiqui opened the floor for public comment.

Public Comment: The following individuals were heard:

- Ari Epstein, Parent, supports complete remote option.
- Kristin Huang, Worcester Street, Parent, supports complete in-person option.
- Daniel Park, Allston Street, Parent, encourages testing for CPS staff routinely twice a week for all onsite workers. He would prefer complete in-person option over a Hybrid option, bringing students into contact with more strangers on the out of class days.
- Joan Epstein, Raymond Street, Parent & Faculty, supports complete remote option, little has changed since closing schools last March.
- Katherine Gamble, Parent, supports complete remote option.
- Judith Epstein, Raymond Street, 10th grade CRLS student, supports complete remote option
- Tim Nicolette, Pearl Street, Parent, not in support of a Hybrid model, it will increase the risk of spreading the virus.
- Elinor Actipis, Whittemore Avenue, Single Parent, supports in-class option for as many as possible with remote learning for those that it's not possible. Remote learning takes the public out of public education.
- Emie Michaud Weinstock, Parent, supports small one to three students zoom classroom remote learning.
- Crystal Komm, Parent, supports complete remote option. She will not be sending her four and six-year old children back to school and endanger children and educators lives.

- Ethridge King, Richdale Avenue, Parent, Election Commission Chair, encourages support of item **#20-149**. There are many venues that are no longer available to the Election Commission due to facilities being too small or in places that are vulnerable to the elderly.
- Jessica Bassett, Kent Street, Election Commission worker, encourages support of item **#20-149**.
- Keith Marzilli Ericson, Concord Avenue, Parent, supports complete in-class option for elementary and middle school students.
- Dan Monahan, Lexington Ave, CEA President, encouraged the district to collaborate with the CEA on all issues, none of the three models are ideal, he also encouraged the decision that Lexington made to deny any in-class option.
- Sue Mapel, Sargent Street, Parent, Asst. Principal at Haggerty School, supports fully remote learning option.
- Katie Miller, FMA Faculty, feels completely neglected and uninformed about what is being decided.
- Courtney Tuttle, Faculty, cannot understand waiting until August as the DESE asks to share decisions with faculty. They cannot plan without having some kind of knowledge of what is to come. Supports re-opening in phases.
- Rose Levine, Cambridge MA, G&P Faculty, concerned about teacher voice being left out of the conversations. Supports complete remote model.
- Betsy Preval, Harvard Avenue, Medford, Faculty, no matter which model is chosen, it will be a messy process. Equity issues are going to be at the helm of the problem.
- Amara Donovan, Cambridge Street, opposed to the lack of concern for students of color in the re-opening plans.
- Tracy Barbaro, supports JK-5 complete in-person model. Students that are in Middle and High School should continue remote model if possible.
- Ariel Dowling, Parent, suggested using the swing school as an additional space.
- Mary-Ann Matyas, Parent, one class per week is totally unacceptable.

On a motion by Vice Chair Bowman, seconded by Member Weinstein, on the following roll call vote, Public Comment ended: Member Rachel YEA; Member Weinstein YEA; Member Wilson YEA; Vice Chair Bowman YEA; Member Fantini YEA; Member Rojas YEA; Mayor Siddiqui YEA.

Vice Chair Bowman moved, seconded by Member Fantini, to suspend the Rules to bring item **#20-149** forward for discussion and adoption. On the following roll call vote, the Rules were suspended for the purpose stated: Member Rachel YEA; Member Weinstein YEA; Member Wilson YEA; Vice Chair Bowman YEA; Member Fantini YEA; Member Rojas YEA; Mayor Siddiqui YEA.

Member Rojas stated that the Buildings and Grounds Sub-Committee has decided to allow the use of five more schools to be added to the original four schools for voting venues in November.

Member Fantini thanked Chairman Rojas and Vice Chair Bowman for working on this issue. It is the right thing to do. This is only going to be a one-time vote for having nine schools for voting venues.

Vice Chair Bowman also thanked Member Rojas for his leadership on moving this Sub-Committee and the Election Commission forward.

Member Weinstein thanked Member Rojas also. He is strongly in support of this motion.

On the following roll call vote, item **#20-149** was adopted: Member Rachel YEA; Member Weinstein YEA; Member Wilson YEA; Vice Chair Bowman YEA; Member Fantini YEA; Member Rojas YEA; Mayor Siddiqui YEA.

Mayor Siddiqui turned the floor over to Dr. Salim, who thanked everyone for their comments and made opening remarks. He agrees that this is a very scary and challenging time for all of us. We want the best for all and do not know what the best looks like. He then framed the presentation for the evening, explaining that there will be information shared to the Committee from the Task Force Representatives

Dr. Jill Crittenden, Dr. Bradley Bernstein and Dr. Helen Jenkins. The presentation is online and can be viewed from the School Committee website.

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1fSZYRs6xCY8vQ-V4MBI0had7klFraknp1HAhMwnDqPI/edit?usp=sharing>

The presentation was paused and the floor was turned back to the Chair who commented that Cambridge is in a unique position to be able to think about the potential to survey the health of all employees and students. Space constraints is another conversation if we are going to go six feet, where will we find the space?

Dr. Crittenden explained the different ways to contact viruses. Aerosols contain viruses and can travel around a room. This is interrelated to ventilation systems. Six feet is better than three feet, but six feet is a problem if the ventilation system is poor, it also depends on how protected a person is, how long people are exposed to an infected person and how close people are to that person. Good ventilation dilutes the aerosols. Surveillance is an important contributor to keeping everyone safe also. Since we cannot always control masks and hand washing, six feet distancing becomes more important.

Dr. Jenkins emphasized the surveillance piece. We need to know what the rates are in Cambridge, Boston and other surrounding areas.

Dr. Bernstein suggested that we monitor schools, we need excellent PPE with distancing being almost the last thing on the list.

The Chair stated that if we do three feet, it creates a contingency for testing. We have the potential to use that strategy here in Cambridge, we have not had those conversations yet. If we have the masks along with three feet sticks out for her as a possible solution. If we decide on six feet, where do we find the space?

Member Fantini asked if testing should be part of our protocol.

- Dr. Bernstein states that Cambridge is in a perfect position to do testing. The more testing CPS can provide the safer Cambridge will be.

Member Fantini asked if ultra violet rays kill the virus.

- Dr. Crittenden is not sure about how much air can be treated, but it is an excellent point and it should be well considered particularly for bathrooms. UV rays are very effective for killing airborne viruses such as measles.

Member Rojas asked about other available space in the district, in particular swing space. He also asked about testing to keep sick people from coming into the schools, how do other entities deal with privacy issues on testing and how do we know when to move from one model to another – what are the triggers?

- Dr. Salim responded that the swing space at the Longfellow building, cannot accommodate enough students. Once we know whether or not we are going with six feet or three feet, we will know how much more space to be looking for more in classrooms for a hybrid model.
- Dr. Bernstein responded that testing teachers means they don't pass it to their families, it's good to know if there is spiking in any building. Privacy issues may need to be consulted with OSHA rules, as long as we are talking about voluntary testing. We may need to consult lawyers for mandatory testing.
- Dr. Jenkins clarified that there are different metrics that can be used to identify trigger points. They don't have a perfect and accurate idea of what is best, but what happens in Boston is going to affect us in Cambridge and we would like to be ready. We need to prepare our trigger points ahead of time.

Member Rachel is thankful to ground this conversation in science. She asked about whether or not hybrid is safer than in person. If children take off their masks, what spacing and ventilation is required, how many of our rooms have poor or great ventilation.

- Dr. Jenkins answered this is a valid point that hybrid may increase the risk of passing the virus along. It may be better to be completely in-person. It may be better to bring back the younger children because it is harder for them to learn at home.
- Dr. Bernstein replied it is likely things will change over the school year. We can modulate a hybrid model to reduce in person contact and increase spacing. It would be harder to modulate an in person model.
- Dr. Crittenden responded that if kids take their masks off, the teachers need to be well equipped, ventilation needs to be excellent and teachers need to be equipped with shields and enclosures. Unmasked kids will need to adhere to six feet separation at all times.
- Mr. Maloney answered that they have two buildings, Amigos and CambridgePort, that do not have good ventilation and they will be focusing on them with air scrubbers and fans; two fans one fan blowing air in and one fan sucking air out. They are working on taking readings and he is pretty comfortable with making sure they are taken at the right times and under the correct conditions for accurate results. They reached out to churches and other buildings for additional space however CPS cannot control the fresh air in those buildings. The King and the King Open have CO2 unit readers built in. They will be purchasing monitors for all buildings.

Member Wilson asked about the difference in hybrid models, how many classrooms we have currently vs. where we will be, for the other buildings that cannot spend the money to make the buildings safe for our students, can we help and around the trauma for our mental health students, and the concerns for our employees and lastly about the process for partners that come in after our school day is over.

- Dr. Jenkins stated that it is a shame week on week off is being ruled out. They could recuperate if they happen to be sick, but she understands all of the other concerns that were considered.
- Dr. Salim asked Mr. Maloney to share how many buildings we have on our chart for three or six feet distancing.
- Mr. Maloney responded that it varies. What is important is that some buildings have JKK through grade 8. There are about 600 classrooms in the district. Mr. Maloney presumes that through rental agreements, we will have to pay to bring those other buildings, i.e. churches etc up to our standards of safety.
- Dr. Salim stated that it is very important to make sure we identify all of the necessary supports that will be needed to be considered for re-entry. Some students are simply not going to wear a mask. It cannot be looked at as a disciplinary issue, we need to understand why.
- Mr. Maloney stated that our after school partners are going to be determined later, and it complicates matters a lot. We will be hiring additional custodians regardless for at least half a year if not the full year.

Vice Chair Bowman acknowledged the leadership and work in our district. She is concerned that testing may be challenging. People come from other areas than Cambridge, are we testing regionally, citywide. She asked what happens if we start with the in-class model and then have to change, what is the expertise to go back and forth between models. Also, how do we move forward from six feet to three feet, lastly, how do we address maintenance without AC in the summer and open windows in the winter at schools like the Amigos and maintain a comfortable learning environment?

- It was answered that the test is self-administered now and you don't have to go quite so deep so it is not as painful as it used to be.
- Mayor Siddiqui stated that Worcester and Boston are 1st and 2nd. Cambridge is 3rd in testing. There is no regionally testing strategies although there should be. We are in good shape as a state. Many cities do not have the funding to test everyone.
- Dr. Bernstein stated that colleges are going to be testing every week, and other school districts are considering it also.
- No one was able to say how to transition between models smoothly.

- Dr. Bernstein replied that in best practices, i.e. hospitals, it is fine to distant at three feet, however, children cannot be relied on to exercise best practices.
- Dr. Crittenden does not know the reason for the three feet change. She encouraged considering going to five feet or four feet also.
- Mr. Maloney responded that the Cambridgeport School is in the most need of new windows, we will need to have a fallback if we cannot have any school safe. We have to focus on our old buildings other than a complete tear down and re-hab. We need to have a fall back for our older buildings, for the time being we are going to do whatever is necessary to get things to work. CPS will not knowingly put or let any students stay in a space that is not safe or comfortable. We have lots of PPE.
- Dr. Crittenden stated that the air quality can be measured. If they are not as we want, six feet and testing will need to happen. Having technical experts is important.

Member Weinstein thanked the Task Force. What about outdoor spaces within the city? He expects there will be times that we are going to be remote, are we thinking about childcare needs for families and caregivers for a week or months? Essential workers and people with lower incomes will need to work if we are in a hybrid or remote mode. To safely open, are we able to say no one will be exposed. Do we know enough about long-term impact on children who don't register as sick?

- Mr. Maloney responded that we have parks and playgrounds and they are on our list for future discussions. The best thing to do is to make our buildings work and then use the swing space, art space, gym space for eating outside at lunch time.
- Dr. Salim responded that there is no question there is that need. If conditions are such that we don't open schools, we have not engaged in thoughts around how would we open up childcare settings instead.
- Dr. Jenkins stated most likely if we need it we should be prepared. It is not up to any school district, it's up to Governor Baker.
- Dr. Crittenden stated that we will need to pivot to that possibility quickly.
- Dr. Jenkins stated that the virus is too new for us to know what level of transmission will be accepted or expected. People view risks differently.
- Dr. Bernstein stated that we need to think about ways to minimize risks.

Vice Chair Bowman, based on Member Weinstein's question of racial equity and communities of color, how should we be thinking of opening schools from a medical point of view.

- Dr. Crittenden stated that testing is important. The school buses need to be controlled for transmission.
- Dr. Bernstein responded that testing needs to be community wide throughout all schools.

Member Fantini stated that we need to look at the busing issue. Our kids need to walk more. Three or six feet, since some parents are going to choose remote learning, we should be able to accommodate six feet spacing. His concern is for the population of our smaller children that won't wear masks; the smaller children really need to be in school.

Mr. Maloney stated that we have returned some of our students to school already. They are using our Special Education buses; it is likely that schools around the country will be opening during the hot spots.

Dr. Crittenden mentioned swabbing the bathroom where there are a lot of viruses it could give the teachers more confidence that no one in their classroom is infected, and supplying PPE for the teachers is particularly important.

The meeting returned to the presentation. The PowerPoint presentation ended and the floor returned to the Chair.

Mayor Siddiqui opened the floor for discussion.

Member Rojas asked on the origin of the hybrid model; is it from the Task Force or from the CPS.

- Dr. Salim answered that the task force was not asked to choose a model. The principals seem to think that the remote option is more for general education.

Member Rojas also asked about curriculum policies and what are the changes in our curriculum according to these hybrid and remote models?

- Dr. Salim responded that remote only option may have a state wide adoption of a platform of a new curriculum made available for students. Our curriculum frameworks are created by the state and approved by a budget process for our district. There needs to be an adaptation of the existing curriculum frameworks, there is no new curriculum being introduced.

Member Rojas also asked the need to refocus on the educational standards, what if we cannot cover all of the standards, where do stand on this issue?

- Dr. Salim commented that it is not uncommon in any school to identify areas that need more and adjust to the need.

On a motion by Vice Chair Bowman motioned, seconded by Member Fantini, the Rules were suspended to extend the meeting to 9:30 p.m.: Member Rachel YEA; Member Weinstein YEA; Member Wilson YEA; Vice Chair Bowman YEA; Member Fantini YEA; Member Rojas YEA; Mayor Siddiqui YEA.

Member Weinstein asked the experts which model should we adopt from a scientific standpoint?

- Dr. Jenkins responded that the model of one day on, one day off will need more information. Does a virus hang around from day to day in a building?
- Dr. Crittenden answered that it looks like it's better to have two days on two days off. There is more time for cleaning etc.

Member Weinstein asked if one week in, week out would work.

- Dr. Jenkins stated that by the week would be better from a scientific view, but not necessarily from an educational view.
- Dr. Crittenden stated it is important to remember that when you need more childcare, you are also introducing more opportunity for infection.

Member Rachel reiterated how scary and hard this time is for everyone. It is thankless work to come up with answers when there really are none. She asked for more specific plans for grades 6-12.

- Dr. Salim on remote only alternative, considering the upper schools 6-8, there is only one math teacher in each building; there will have to be a different model than what the curriculum coordinators are working on. The models are the possibilities not that we have to choose one over the other. The parents are going to decide what they want to do with their children.

Member Wilson stated she is disappointed about the week on week off model that was not actually presented to us. She appreciates and respects the educators point of view however she wants to emphasize she appreciates and recognizes our experts also. She heard the sense of not spreading the virus if the young person gets sick and is able to stay home for a week to recover.

Member Wilson asked if families are opting to transfer out, do we have a strong practice of exit interviews.

- Dr. Salim responded that we do have exit surveys and we use them regularly. We share them on the annual cycle. The Superintendent added there are tradeoffs when looking at different models.

Member Wilson stated that she wants to make sure we are uplifting educator voices as we make our decisions. Are there any Special Education educators on the Task Force?

- Dr. Salim answered that there are educators in the Working Groups, the Task Force utilizes the CEA and the CPAP.

Member Wilson asked is there a Behavioral Health Task Force? What other organizations are we partnering with other than Riverside?

- Dr. Salim responded that there is a Wellbeing Working Group and they are looking at those concerns as their major focus.

Member Wilson asked what is the impact on the classroom where one student tests positive for Covid 19? She also wants to know about masks breaks and handwashing breaks.

- Dr. Salim responded he thinks it is critical and principals are looking at that, also looking at outdoor spaces being so much safer than indoors.

Member Weinstein stated that in each of these models, we need to understand exactly what the plan is. What elements of remote learning are we promoting?

- Dr. Salim agrees that reflecting and seeing where we are is a valuable approach to creating the correct plan, along with looking at and using data. He also wants to see all of the details of each individual piece.

Member Fantini stated he is not going to be ready to vote next week, his sense is that we don't have the staff for day care needs to support any of the models that are being recommended. We need more models. We need to do this right. He would say K-5 all in school, 6-12 all remote because that is the staffing that we have. He knows that people are really working hard, but we need to take a deep breath here and think about what we can do well. We need interventions and one on one for math and reading. He is relying on the Chair and the Vice Chair to bring this all together.

- Dr. Salim stated that we cannot plan for models that do not exist. To consider bringing in elementary kids only, and spreading them out across the district, we would need twice the number of teachers to accommodate all K to 5 kids. It would accommodate the spacing issue only it will not accommodate the staffing issue.

Vice Chair Bowman commented that it is important to be comfortable in whatever decision we make. This is a tough position to be in, it will be helpful for us to agree. The parents are leaning more towards the in-person model; the educators are leaning more towards the remote learning model. This puts the School Committee in a hard spot.

Mayor Siddiqui feels similar to Member Fantini's comments. She understands that Dr. Salim wants us to decide on these first and then more can be decided on. First, the three feet verses six feet needs to be decided. Do we have teacher willingness to return to three feet? 1/3 of the teachers do not want to return to three feet. Are the churches and the youth centers a no go? We have to know in order to decide. It seems like what we have in front of us leads to more questions instead of providing answers. There are broad questions on transportation and the budget. If we do not get it right, it should not be because we have not been diligent and thoughtful on every aspect. There are still too many fundamental questions that have come up that the Committee has to feel good about before decisions can be made.

Member Wilson asked about the pre-school students and students in the lottery, what happens to those kids' seats.

- Mr. Maloney answered that if you don't take your seat, you forfeit it. If there is a remote option, certainly you take it. Some students can apply for a sabbatical, but they would lose their year.

Member Rojas is very interested in the platform that the state will provide in other languages.

- Dr. Salim stated that we will find out more information from DESE.

Vice Chair Bowman announced to the public that the SC office is working on a plan to figure out how to return to the School Committee Meeting Room for conducting meetings. We are still trying to figure out what the actual date is and how it will roll out.

On a motion by Member Fantini, seconded by Member Rojas, on the following roll call vote, the meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m: Member Rachel YEA; Member Weinstein YEA; Member Wilson YEA; Member Fantini YEA; Member Rojas YEA; Vice Chair Bowman YEA; Mayor Siddiqui YEA.

Attest: 

Doshia Beard

Executive Secretary to the School Committee