

## **City Council – Committee on Education Minutes**

Date: December 21, 2020 5:30 – 6:30pm

Zoom Meeting

### **Committee Members**

At Large Councillor Afroz Khan, Chair

At Large Councillor Barry Connell

Ward 1 Councillor Sharif Zeid

Sean Reardon, Co-Chair, School Committee Member

Brian Callahan, School Committee Member

Bruce Menin, School Committee Member

### **Guests**

Superintendent Gallagher

Brett Murphy, Whittier School Committee Member

Nancy Lysik, Newburyport School Treasurer

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### **Agenda Items Discussed**

#### **1. Committee Items**

##### **COMM235\_03\_20\_2020 – Ltr re: SC Appt. of Brett Murphy to Whittier Vo-Tech Cmte**

Chair Khan introduced Brett Murphy to the committee. His letter of recommendation from the School Committee was sent to the City Council for Receive and File but prior to that action, it was sent to the Education Committee as an opportunity to meet Mr. Murphy. Chair Khan asked Mr. Murphy to introduce himself and give his background with the school.

Mr. Murphy shared that he is currently the chairman and has been on the committee for almost 18 years. He enjoys the position and working with the Superintendent at Whittier. Mr. Menin asked about Whittier's policy on handling vocational hands-on classes. Mr. Murphy shared that Whittier is doing the hybrid approach and is trying to prioritize vocational classes as getting more hours. Chair Khan asked if there are grants being used to test students for COVID. Mr. Murphy shared that testing of students is being coordinated with PMA Haverhill but he is not aware of any grants for that. Mr. Reardon asked if Whittier has had to switch to all remote since the start. Mr. Murphy shared that they started in hybrid but they had to switch to all remote for less than 10 days around Thanksgiving. He further explained that every day on the website there is a status on the number of students and teachers that have been positive for COVID. Mr. Callahan asked if positive cases get reported to communities directly through the Health Departments. Mr. Murphy said that they communicate with the city of Haverhill Dept. of Public Health. Cllr Zeid asked a question regarding a major capital project at Whittier on the building itself. Mr. Murphy shared they are in the eligibility phase and no feasibility study has been done yet. Chair Khan thanked Mr. Murphy for participating.

### **COMM273-10-13-2020 Ltr of Non-Support from Mayor for Acts of 1987**

Chair Khan shared a draft memo for the group regarding a response to the Mayor's letter of Non-support to the Acts of 1987. She worked with her co-Chair, Mr. Reardon on questions and aspects to understand that can be in the form of a communication from the Education Committee to the city council that would identify details on how the adoption of the Acts would apply procedurally if Newburyport adopts it. The questions on this memo identify important timeline of steps in terms of when these specific steps would come through. The intention is to send these to the city solicitor for assistance in interpretation.

A question that came up in terms of the procedural aspect on the implementation of an action through the Acts was the budget process and when/how the school committee would communicate any increase above what is proposed by the Mayor. Superintendent Gallagher shared that there are various checkpoints along the budget process with the school committee prior to the submission of the first draft version of the budget which originates with the school councils at the specific schools. At the upcoming joint meeting of the city council and the school committee on January 12<sup>th</sup> he will go through that. The Superintendent recommends that the questions in the memo be sent to their legal advisor so they can help answer these questions.

Cllr Zeid voiced his support of the Acts of 1987 but was not sure where we were going with this effort; is there an intention to resubmit it? Cllr Khan shared that her intention with this is to provide clarification on points that are not well defined, and it may be important to understand the specifics on how it can be executed prior to adoption if reconsidered in the future.

Cllr Connell asked the Superintendent about the financial repercussions from COVID and how relief will be provided to municipalities and where that relief gets integrated into the budget process. The Superintendent shared that he is hopeful for a stimulus extension for the second half of the year to get more funding. At this time, he is concerned about what level of funding will come from the Circuit Breaker and Chapter 70 money.

Cllr Connell wanted to be clear in his message to the School Committee and the Superintendent that the budget should be based on what we can afford based on local contributions and that anything additional from the federal stimulus effort should be factored on top of that. Mr. Callahan agreed with what was stated by Cllr Connell.

Chair Khan asked the committee if it was worth this effort of producing the memo. Mr. Menin shared that while he is not in favor of the Acts of 1987 for our city, he thinks these questions warrant answering and understanding. Mr. Reardon also expressed interest in moving forward with the memo so that if we want to consider in the future, we understand all aspects. Chair Khan said she will send this to Superintendent Gallagher to get reviewed by their legal counsel. Prior to sending though, Chair Khan will post the memo and ask the committee to see if there are additional questions or aspects they want to include in the memo.

The Committee voted in support of bringing out COMM235\_03\_20\_2020 – Ltr re: SC Appt. of Brett Murphy to Whittier Vo-Tech Cmte.

## 2. Superintendent Update

Superintendent Gallagher shared that they have not heard yet from the MSBA on the SOI. If they have not heard back by now, that typically means it is not going to be granted and that they will need to resubmit in the Spring. In terms of Capital Projects, they start the process in January reviewing the projects completed, partially completed and still on the list. In working with Steve Bergholm, they have not gone through all of this yet. In last years plan there was a plan for the bleachers to be fixed in the high school gym but that is going to be put into the operation budget under buildings and grounds. No big updates at this time because the process hasn't started yet. There will be a larger vetting of these projects at the joint meeting with the city council on January 12<sup>th</sup>.

Chair Khan asked what questions the committee would like addressed by the school administration at the meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup>. The following items were identified by the committee:

- What is the status of the high school roof? \$20,000 was appropriated to do quick fixes; how much of that is left and how much will that cover for how long (Cllr Zeid)
- What is the long-term planning for 2021 and how does that map to the district goals/strategic plan? (Cllr Zeid)
- How is the budget looking at the return of students to school? Will additional funds be needed to get kids back in school or if going full remote as we look to Fall 2021? (Cllr Zeid)
- How is the budget taking into account curriculum offerings similar to what Ms. Lysik put together on the STEM related courses at the high school during the MSBA SOI discussion (Cllr Khan)
- What is the status of the High School Chiller and when is that expected to be replaced? (Cllr Khan)

Chair Khan asked about the timeline for the Strategic Plan Task Forces. SG stated they are currently working on the narrative, a summary of the previous five years; similar to the entry plan and then sending the narrative to the SC. Estimating that in Spring we can start the subcommittee work with the idea to present a new plan in September/October of 2021. Chair Khan requested that the narrative take into consideration of tying tangible financial goals.

Cllr Zeid asked about an item under discussion by the School Committee later in the evening with a possible vote. The Superintendent stated that the Medical Advisory Team will give an update on the metrics and how that will impact the learning model after the holidays. They have seen an uptick in COVID cases and while contact tracing is done it is being becoming obsolete as the virus is becoming more prevalent. Cllr Zeid shared that as a parent it is hard to know how to voice opinions during public comment when it's not clear on when these discussions are happening. He did share that having the packet posted in advance is an improvement and very helpful.

Chair Khan asked for a motion to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 6:24pm.