

**Salem School Committee
Special Meeting
Meeting Minutes
August 6, 2020**

On August 6, 2020 the Salem School Committee held a Special School Committee Meeting at 7:00pm.

In Attendance: Mayor Driscoll, Mary Manning, James Fleming, Ana Nuncio, Amanda Campbell, Manny Cruz, Kristin Pangallo, Duncan Mayer, Stephen Zrike

Others In Attendance: In Attendance: Kate Carbone, Dr. Yarrington, Ann Berman, Deborah Connerty

Call to Order

Mayor Driscoll called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

School Reopening Plan

Mayor Driscoll introduced Dr. Stephen Zrike to discuss the school reopening plans. Dr. Zrike introduced Dr. Yarrington a parent and a Physician at Boston Medical Center. She was a lead on Covid Care in the maternity department. She is working with Salem on health safety. Dr. Zrike began his presentation.

Dr. Zrike explained he would present the information with a hope that after discussion we will move towards a vote on Monday night. He referred to a quote by Shayla R. Griffin, PhD, MSW. He explained and understands that there really are no good choices in starting school however, it is his job to make decisions.

Dr. Zrike went through the core values, Wellness, Equity, Community, and Flexibility. He informed the public he is utilizing guidelines set forth by the State. He explained the district will be reaching out to the most ----children. He further requested support from everyone who works for Salem and support from the public. In addition, he added we need to be flexible with the return of school as situations can change from week to week.

The Superintendent explained to the Committee and the public a variety of ways he has solicited feedback from the stakeholders. This outreach was done through surveys, focus groups, Facebook Live, town halls, virtual meet and greets, and through the Salem Returns Task Force. Dr. Zrike went on to explain decisions were made to reflect both science and stakeholder feedback. Some concerns in regards to the hybrid model were childcare, cohort sizes, the ability for teachers to teach both in person and remotely. He discussed the need to social emotional support for the children and the need to possibly go full remote. He also explained he understands the concerns regarding our HVAC systems and will update the staff and community in a future meeting.

The next topic was surrounding impact of in-person and remote learning for different grade levels. He explained the differences between impacts with older students and younger students. He identified that older students were able to learn remotely better than the younger student population. His concerns about remote learning for the older students were social isolation. The younger population was discussed next. Dr. Zrike is concerned about the younger population's ability to access remote learning, there are concerns with achieving grade appropriate reading levels and, finally he explained the younger population is the least at risk for spreading COVID.

At the point, Dr. Zrike moved into explaining the plan for the return of Salem students. The plan is to maintain remote learning for grades 4-12 and in-person instruction for grades PreK-3. The grades ranging from 4 to 12 will have a more rigorous remote learning experience than was done last spring. He did include that the district will identify priority students who will receive in person instruction. Dr. Zrike discussed the reasons we are bringing back grades PreK to 3. He believes that in person instruction for this population is important because not being in school will be more detrimental than attending school. However, he will have an option for parents to opt in to remote learning with teachers should they feel as though that is what is best for them. He added there will be options at all grade levels for students to opt for remote learning. Dr. Zrike explained we developed a plan that gives both students and teachers options.

Chelsey Banks then discussed the plan in detail. She discussed ways the district is making the return equitable for all students. She explained we will build a strong foundation, utilize outdoor spaces, and create access to supports or options to meet all needs. She explained the high school level will utilize synchronous learning. Synchronous learning allows for discussions, feedback, and conversations between students and teachers. The other part of the remote experience will include asynchronous learning. This will give students an opportunity to learn at any time of the day. She discussed concerns about remote learning. The biggest concern is social interaction. The district has created "The Hub" to address student needs. For example, we will allow for some in-person opportunities for example freshman Friday. In addition, we are creating Hub Labs, which will allow for therapy, services, to give students additional information should they want to move forward on need additional support.

Ms. Banks introduced Assistant Superintendent Kate Carbone to outline what learning will look like at the secondary level. Ms. Carbone explained that instruction for the secondary level is going to be more rigorous than what students experienced last the spring. She explained the school year is now reduced to 170 days for students and teachers will attend the 185 days. This will allow teachers ten days of professional development for remote learning strategies. In the upcoming year we will comply with the State's requirement of hours. This means 935 hours at the secondary level and 850 hours at the elementary level.

Ms. Carbone explained the students will attend full days versus what was done last spring. The students will be in cohort of 10 students to 1 teacher. She explained we are required now to take attendance and use our traditional grading systems as was done pre-covid.

Ms. Banks outlined instruction for grades PreK-3. She talked about prioritizing building relationships, and addressing social emotional needs. The second priority is to build foundational skills. This is to prevent long-term impacts on children. She explained bringing the youngest learners in will help them to train the students on remote platforms in the event we are faced with a resurgence of Covid. She then gave detailed information of how the in-person programming will work for both students and staff.

Ms. Carbone gave an overview of the physical spacing for the in-person learning model. She informed the Committee they will, if needed, utilize additional space at the Collins Middle School and at the High School. She discussed additional supervision with remote onsite supervision. The district is also reviewing options for children of Salem educators. Finally, she talked about maintaining cohorts. Working with partners to provide extended day and maximize ability to maintain student cohorts to minimize exposure.

Ms. Carbone explained which students are considered priority students. These students would be grouped in tiers. There are four tiers. Tier 1 is associated with ELs level 1 & 2. Also included are students who are living in foster care, living in households with limited internet access, and of course students in grades PK, K, Gr1-3. Tier two, is designed for students in transition to grades 6 and 9. Students who are significantly behind academically. Tier 3 is designed for students who opt into in person learning if possible, to maintain safety. Tier 4 is for parents who believe in person learning is more beneficial for their students.

Dr. Zrike discussed the changes to the school year calendar. He introduced Ms. Banks as the project manager for Salem Returns. He then identified the needs to prepare for opening. Some of these needs include, improved air systems, protocols, and outdoor spaces. In conjunction with this, he will assign COVID Coordinators, he will work closely with the Board of Health, and determine benchmarks to open schools or to close schools. He also discussed we have adequate supplies. He wants to implement reasonable HR policies supporting employee health and safety. Finally, he will develop and agree to a MOU with union partners.

Mayor Driscoll bulleted several parts of the presentation and identified key points of the presentation for the public. She explained PPE will be provided for staff and students. Mayor Driscoll updated the Committee about the repairs to HVAC and keeping up on necessary repairs to our buildings for safe return of staff and students. She explained a vote on this proposal will take place on Monday and that this meeting is for sharing the plan. Mayor Driscoll asked for questions from the Committee.

Duncan Mayer asked about the risk of children in PreK-3 of spreading the virus to adults. Dr. Yarrington explained that the spread of the virus shows a divide in children under age 12 and over age 12. She explained that there is no doubt that data supports the younger ages are far less susceptible. Mr. Cruz asked the impact of COVID in the Latino community. Dr. Yarrington confirmed that the Latino community have been impacted greatly. She explained that certain aspects of life make this population far more susceptible.

Mayor Driscoll expressed her frustration about not having benchmarks as to when it is safe to reopen versus not reopening. Therefore, she explained she would like to create her own benchmarks. She talked about other states who do have benchmarks to measure what is safe. Mayor Driscoll explained this information is absolutely necessary. Ms. Campbell asked about the involvement of Human Resources and asked if we are increasing our substitutes and will they be trained in the protocols. Chelsey Banks explained they have two types of substitutes, daily subs and building subs. We have posted for both of these positions. She also explained there will be training for those who are hired. Ms. Campbell also asked about special educational services while maintaining the cohort model. Ms. Carbone explained they will work with principals to plan schedules. Nothing is set yet but we are working on scheduling students with the greatest need first. Ms. Campbell asked about the weekly deep cleaning. Dr. Zrike answered we are having kids come every so we will not have one day out for cleaning. However, we will have additional custodians on to clean and that will occur as students leave since it is a shorter day. Ms. Campbell also asked about the Saltonstall Calendar. Ms. Carbone explained that we are unifying the district around a similar schedule. Therefore, the last week of October which Saltonstall normally has off will be moved up a week and the entire district will be off at that time.

Mayor Driscoll recognized Dr Pangallo inquired if staff are in quarantine and need a leave will they be paid. Dr. Zrike informed them that it is covered under the Families First Act. Dr. Pangallo asked about

contact tracing and Dr. Zrike informed her this will be established with our COVID Coordinators, and we do have systems in place to develop a plan. Dr. Pangallo asked about the opt-in program and asked about the HUB would it be held outside for students who may have a medical concern. Chelsey Banks informed her yes they will be held outside.

Dr. Pangallo also stated the surveys under counted our minority groups. She explained to the public surveys were not the only method information was delivered. She explained that she and Ms. Manning worked other groups to expand information and the survey was one method but not the only method. Mayor Driscoll called on Mr. Fleming.

Mr. Fleming agreed students in PreK-3 should be in school. He did agree that younger students may not contract the virus as easily. However, he asked about the transmission of the virus of younger people to the teachers. Mr. Fleming wants plans in place for instant testing for teachers and this is his concern with voting on this plan. Mayor Driscoll added we do have testing partners and we are opening up community testing. She encouraged the public to take advantage of this. Dr. Yarrington confirmed that older people with health conditions are more susceptible to the virus. She explained the PPE and distance will reduce the risk of transmission. Ms. Campbell asked about masks and which type of PPE should the staff have to keep them safe? Dr. Yarrington explained the difference is touching the mask and then touching your face. In the hospital we throw away the mask to prevent contamination. She discussed how a N95 mask works and doesn't see this as an appropriate way to protect yourself as they are difficult to breath in. Ms. Manning asked about the COVID Coordinator position and if there is more information on this position. Chelsey Banks explained ,we added this but we do not have information on the positions now but will work on it and release it to her. Ms. Manning also asked a webinar scheduled for the next day. Mayor Driscoll explained it is a webinar with Dr. Roberts. This is to review statistics and answer any questions for re-opening.

Mayor Driscoll asked Dr. Yarrington about what her estimate on COVID is going forward. Dr. Yarrington explained her information is coming from estimates from Boston Medical and can vary from county to county. She explained the second wave of COVID is expected at the beginning of December. She explained the challenge is that once we receive a great number of cases it is too late to slow it down. Mayor Driscoll asked her to talk more about generational families. Should families wear masks in their homes. Dr. Yarrington explained the best way to maintain safety is for adults to keep distance at pick up and drop off is important. Also, teachers need to keep distance to maintain safety. Mr. Cruz asked Dr. Zrike about a policy around staff. Dr. Zrike explained if there is a barrier we will work with them. Educators may be able to bring their children with them. Ms. Campbell asked about testing at intervals versus at exposure. Dr. Yarrington explained the test is not perfect. She explained that the test is painful and not a small thing to ask of people.

Dr. Zrike expressed he wants on-going communication. He knows this is not easy and this will be a constant year of tweaking. He will be out and getting information as much as he can. Ms. Nuncio asked how many kids in Prek-3 have asthma or pulmonary issues? Dr. Zrike will check on this with the Nursing Director and the Board of Health. Mr. Fleming asked to hear from President Berman.

Mayor Driscoll asked about the eight-week cycle. She asked for additional information on this. Dr. Zrike explained there is an opt-in option in the earlier grades. However, you have to commit until the November date. Mayor Driscoll asked about the decision to bring back PreK – 3 what the reasons are around this as it pertains to technology. She wanted him to explain why not start remote. Dr. Zrike

explained why this group is coming back. One reason is regression that can occur. He worries about significant gaps and feels socialization is very important for this age group. Dr. Zrike agrees the shift of going full remote is very valid. Having them come in now is an excellent opportunity for these students to learn how to engage remotely. Finally, he wants students to have connections with their teachers.

At this time Mayor Driscoll invited Ann Berman to speak on behalf of the Teachers' Union. Ms. Berman addressed the School Committee in support of a remote opening plan. She explained there were several schools who had COVID out breaks while maintaining social distancing and PPE. She expressed there are too many unanswered questions. She explained it is inevitable COVID will be brought into our schools. She is concerned over vulnerable students and staff having exposure to COVID. She concerned about different aged students with some attending remote while others attend in person. She expressed concern about having enough substitutes. Finally, she asked if why we have to hold classes while will the School Committee stop using Zoom to hold their meetings.

Mayor Driscoll referred to Dr. Jill Conrad for Public Comment.

*The Public Comment section of the minutes is attached.

Mayor Driscoll thanked all who submitted comments. She understands there is a tremendous amount of work to do. She planned on having a question and answer session. Additionally, we are holding a webinar for staff to ask questions. Finally, Monday there will be a vote on the plan on Monday. She then asked for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Cruz asked for a copy of the plan for the public and the Committee.

Mr. Fleming motioned to adjourn and Ms. Manning seconded. Vote by rollcall:

Ms. Nuncio:	Yes
Dr. Pangallo:	Yes
Ms. Campbell:	Yes
Mr. Cruz:	Yes
Mr. Fleming:	Yes
Ms. Manning:	Yes
Mayor Driscoll:	Yes

Meeting adjourned at 10:51 pm.

Respectfully submitted by

Jennifer A. Gariepy

Executive Assistant to the School Committee
& the Superintendent