

**BRISTOL WARREN REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE
VIRTUAL MEETING MINUTES
April 20, 2020**

A virtual meeting of the Bristol Warren Regional School Committee was held on April 20, 2020, via ZOOM Video Conferencing. Chairperson Schofield called the meeting to order at approximately 6:05 p.m.

Present: Erin Schofield, Chairperson; Adam Ramos, Vice-Chairperson; Brian Bradshaw, Treasurer; John P. Saviano, Secretary; Sheila Ellsworth, John Bento, Victor Cabral, Marjorie McBride, and Carly Reich; Jonathan T. Brice, Ed.D., Superintendent; Diane Sanna, Ed.D., Assistant Superintendent; Tina Fogell, Esq., Chief Operating Officer; Edward Clarke, Director of Student Support Services; and Mary Ann Carroll, Esq., District Solicitor

Guests: Rose Muller, Director of Information Technology

I. OPENING BUSINESS

- A. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag

All present were invited to join in the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- A. April 2, 2020 School Committee Virtual Meeting

MOTION: Mr. Saviano made a motion to approve the April 2, 2020, School Committee Virtual Meeting Minutes; seconded by Mr. Bradshaw and Mrs. McBride.

The motion passed unanimously (9-0).

III. SUPERINTENDENTS RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. Recommendation #S2020-14: That the School Committee, upon the recommendation of the Superintendent, approve the purchase of Chromebooks for year one of four-year Technology Refresh program.

MOTION: Mrs. McBride made a motion to approve the recommendation; seconded by Mr. Bradshaw.

DISCUSSION:

Dr. Brice referenced the two documents provided to school committee members prior to the meeting regarding this recommendation: 1. Memo to Dr. Brice from Ms. Muller, Director of Information Technology, 2. Information from Dell, the state approved vendor. Dr. Brice stated that he is recommending the school committee to approve the purchase of chromebooks for year one of a four-year Technology Refresh program which amounts to the total amount up to \$480,000.

The chromebooks that would be purchased would actually be leased, and would be leased for our students entering the fifth and ninth grades next year. Those individual students would be able keep these devices for three years. The goal would be for the district to purchase the devices after the end of the third year, use them for the fourth year, and then

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recycle them into the lower grade classrooms during the fifth year to get an extra year from the device. During this time of distance learning, we have loaned out over 700 Chromebooks to students and families that reported that they did not have a device at home and would not have been able to participate in distance learning, in addition to the 2000 devices that have been assigned to and go home with our secondary students. The 700 devices were taken from computer carts in our elementary building classrooms that were not being used as our buildings were closed during distance learning. We recognize the need and want to make sure we are taking a systematic approach and we think that this recommendation within year one of the tech refresh plan puts the district in a position to be really in good shape with our technology infrastructure moving forward.

Mrs. McBride asked for clarification about the number of devices being purchased during year one and insurance plans.

Dr. Brice stated that looking at grade levels, we think that for the 5th grade we have approximately 250 students, and a similar number for the 9th grade, for a total 500 students. Another item we needed to consider is that other grade levels are at the end of their useful life for their machines and they need replacing. I believe that is the rising 7th grade and the rising 8th grade so we have to replace those machines and we also have to replace teacher chromebooks as well.

Dr. Brice stated that the district does offer insurance plans for parents where the parents can take out the insurance and if the screen breaks or things like that the charge would be a minimal charge or it would be covered. It is not a requirement. Some parents avail themselves of that and some don't.

Dr. Brice also stated that when distance learning first began, we recognized that there were some devices that were repaired, but the parents had not paid for the repairs. And so we had to make a decision as to whether or not we were going to withhold the device because those students were actually getting loaner devices when they were at school and they would have to turn the loaner in at the end of the day. We made a decision to provide those devices to them to take home for distance learning. I think that the school committee would support that decision and they would want all students to have a device. We hope that parents purchase the insurance, but we know that every parent does not do that and in the event if the parent doesn't purchase the insurance we also know how critical the chromebooks have been to daily instruction even when we are in our buildings. It really puts the district in a bind. You have to repair the devices. We want students to have that opportunity. Again you hope the parents either make the choice to and can afford to purchase insurance.

Mr. Bradshaw asked for clarification on the 2020 chromebook puzzle document and memo from Ms. Muller indicates in FY 21 that the full lease purchase to Dell for \$480,000.00 is to lease 1,600 chromebooks across grades 5, 6, 7,9, and 10 and when these payments are due.

Dr. Brice stated that it was to lease 1600 chromebooks up to the amount of \$480,000 spread out over the three year life of the lease. The initial memo from Ms. Muller had estimated \$480,000.00 because each device was estimated at \$300.00 (including a case); however,

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the document with information from Dell includes a lease quote which is not as much money for each device.

In addition to this purchase amount, we still have the third year lease payment for a number of chromebooks right now that will be paid next year which is approximately \$22,000.

Mr. Bradshaw asked if this amount for tech purchases was part of the budget that was recently approved by the JFC?

Dr. Brice stated that was correct.

Discussion ensued about soft sided chromebook cases,

Dr. Brice stated that in order to make sure we are in compliance with the policy, the school committee needs to know what the total number is of the purchase amount and the payment that would be made each year over the three year agreement. The recommendation would be to approve the request of the stated amount. In this request, we are only purchasing chromebooks, and it gives us flexibility in case we need to purchase something else within the contract. We do not think there will be anything else, but it gives us some flexibility and we only would provide 3 lease payments, so it will be prorated over the life of the request.

Mr. Ramos stated that the recommendation is to seek approval from the School Committee for up to \$480,000 and that there is a possibility that it will not be this much based on the quotes you have received.

Dr. Brice said that was correct based on the information we have about the technology we need today.

Mrs. Ellsworth mentioned that she would like to look at pricing from other vendors before approval rather than just the one received from Dell.

Mrs. Ellsworth also mentioned the need and request for a comprehensive technology plan for the next five years.

Dr. Brice asked Ms. Muller to speak to the committee regarding the issue of equipment and how we get multiple providers, and the question about how we came up with the number we came up for this year and next year versus the out years?

Ms. Muller mentioned that she has recommended the Dell Chromebook because it has received the best reviews from school departments. We do get a number of devices over the course of a year and we test them out. The durability of the HP and Asus is far inferior to the Dell, simply because they are made for education and they are more of a quality product. Particularly, since we are going to try to get four, maybe five years out of a device, we really need to make sure we pay attention to the durability of it as well as the function.

Mrs. Ellsworth stated that this is a lot of money and it is a huge investment, and would like to see the plan for this year and years to come to see how we sustain what we are trying to do.

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Ms. Muller stated that the analysis that has been done for this recommendation was to purchase a total of 1,600 chromebooks over three years instead of 1,525 because we are anticipating loss because of this year's distance learning with lending the chromebooks out to families this spring. We also have a grade 8 and grade 12 that are supposed to be turning in their Chromebooks and we hope to repurpose them. We are kind of skeptical we are going to get every single one of those back. The additional 75 chromebooks are a cushion so we can make sure everyone is outfitted with a chromebook. We know that there is a 40 plus day lead time for shipping for chromebooks so there was more of an urgency to get this in front of you so we could have this discussion. and this fits into the overall Tech Refresh plan. The overall Tech Refresh plan includes a number of computer labs that need devices to be replaced in the district (music lab in the middle school, one at the high school, fine arts lab at the high school, digital video lab).

Dr. Brice thanked Ms. Muller for her response. He stated that when he talks about loss it is that what he is referring to the use that our machines are getting right now that when they are returned in June, we believe that we are going to have an increased level of machines that need to be taken out of service because they are no longer functioning. We have accelerated the end of life for some of the chromebooks at the elementary level with the ones we have loaned out, as well as the 8th grade level and 12th grade level with what they look like when they come back. We just expect that we will need a larger number of chromebooks to hold in reserve so that is about 75 that we are counting for so that is why the number increased from 1525 to 1600.

Mr. Cabral asked if every student in the district has a chromebook right now.

Dr. Brice stated that every student in the district has a chromebook or a personal device that they are using to access distance learning. We have clearly made devices accessible. Some families that have multiple students in elementary school, we provided one device per family to make sure they had a device. In some cases we are providing hot spots and other ways of internet connectivity for those families. But at the secondary level, all students have chromebooks. We have also created a system that when the device breaks, parents are sending them back or notifying us and we are giving them new chromebooks. I would mention that our current inventory of available chromebooks in the district is lower than what we had when we started distance learning in March.

Mr. Cabral asked what students were assigned chromebooks to take home before distance learning?

Dr. Brice stated that the take-home chromebooks were assigned to all students in secondary, so all middle and high school students. Grades 3-5 had chromebook carts in each classroom at all schools so devices could be utilized during classroom instruction.

Since distance learning began, we have distributed 742 devices, the overwhelming majority of them have been chromebooks, and the overwhelming majority of the chromebooks were loaned at the elementary level: 153 at Colt Andrews, 145 at Guiteras, 251 at Hugh Cole, 101 at Rockwell, 26 at KMS, 29 at Mt. Hope and 37 to TAs and other staff members.

The plan is to collect these 742 chromebooks and have the IT dept. check them and make sure that they continue to be operable and then put them back into the buildings, because all

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of those are the classroom chromebooks that we use at K to 5. We are going to have to sanitize them, we are going to have to check to make sure they are operating the way they are supposed to, and then put them back on the chromebook carts.

Victor Cabral stated that he is in agreement with Ms. Ellsworth about seeing additional bids from other vendors. This is a big purchase and we should get multiple bids before taking a vote.

Mrs. McBride stated that because the bid is from a state approved vendor in Dell.

Mrs. Reich stated that there may be some kiddos within the district that have their own devices in middle & high school. Have we ever explored a tech opt-out? I don't know how much money that would/wouldn't save?

Dr. Brice stated we have not explored a tech opt out and that the issue with this would be one of equity. We want to ensure all of our students have the opportunity to fully participate and have access to the basic platform on how we instruct throughout digital learning and distance learning.

Ms. Muller added that we manage our devices through a Google console and would not be able to manage the security and apps access if students were to bring/use their own devices at schools.

Mr. Saviano asked if there were any more quotes? Did you get bids from three or four companies?

Dr Brice stated that we didn't have to bid as we went through a state approved vendor. If people would like us to get other quotes, we can get other quotes. I would also tell members of the School Committee, what people are seeing with distance learning, I don't think machines will be getting any cheaper.

Mr. Bento stated that staying with one company makes it easier, but maybe getting more quotes may help in getting a lower price.

Mr. Cabral asked the District Solicitor if the recommendation to approve the purchase of chromebooks could leave it open to look at other vendors before the purchase is made?

Attorney Carroll said yes that a motion could be made to allow the Superintendent to buy chromebooks up to \$480,000 without naming the vendor.

Mrs. McBride mentioned that she is not in support of changing the recommendation to look for more vendors and get more quotes before purchasing as she is in support of the recommendation presented to the school committee this evening.

Mr. Cabral stated that he was going to vote no, as the school committee should be getting more quotes to make the informed decision regarding this recommendation.

Chairperson Schofield mentioned that she will be voting in support of this recommendation and there can be a workshop on the Tech Refresh plan and would recommend having a

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workshop on Tech in the near future. It doesn't seem that now is the time to switch vendors for the time.

The motion to approve the recommendation to purchase chromebooks for year one of a four year Tech Refresh Plan passed with a vote of 6-3, with Mr. Cabral, Mr. Bradshaw and Mrs. Ellsworth dissenting.

- B. Recommendation #S2020-15: That the School Committee, upon the recommendation of the Superintendent, approve the 2020-2021 School Calendar.

Mr. Saviano read the recommendation into record. Chairperson Schofield announced that there was a workshop in February where the Superintendent presented 3 versions of the calendar and put it out to the public for viewing and discussion. Dr. Brice will be recommending one calendar to us this evening with the caveat that we do not know what will become of the beginning of next school year during this COVID-19 pandemic.

MOTION: Mr. Ramos made a motion to approve the 2020-2021 School Calendar recommendation of the Superintendent for discussion. Mrs. McBride seconded the motion for discussion.

DISCUSSION:

Mr. Cabral stated that the Calendar Option 2 with three full PD days and 5 Early Release Days would be difficult for parents and families. Option 1 with four full PD Days seems less burdensome to parents.

Mrs. Ellsworth asked about the response from the survey that was sent out to the BWRSD community.

Dr. Brice stated that the results from the survey were overwhelmingly in support of Option 1 with the four full days of Professional Development.

Dr. Brice discussed that we are at a point that there are no easy answers to approving a calendar. Four full pd days next year is very similar to our calendar for this year, however there is a professional development day later in the year next year which is better. During this distance learning period, we have learned that four full days of professional development is not enough. It is imperative that we look at working with our union partners to discuss professional development and what is best for teaching and learning for all staff and students and build job embedded professional development.

Calendar Options 1, 2, and 3 have different total of PD hours for staff.

- Option 1 has four full days of PD Days spread out over the course of the year.
- Option 2 has three full days of PD for staff and five early release days over the course of the year.
- Option 3 has two full PD Days and 8 Early Release Days over the course of the year.

Dr. Brice stated that Option 2 would be the best option for building professional development over the course of the year; but is not tenable at this time given what we are currently dealing with.

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Dr. Brice stated that his recommendation to the school committee would be to approve Option 1 for the 2020-2021 school year calendar with the caveat that the school committee directs him to engage with the two union partners in looking at a comprehensive professional development plan for next year. What we have seen over the past month with distance learning is the need for professional development.

MOTION: Mrs. McBride made a motion to vote on the recommendation from the Superintendent to approve the 2020-2021 School Calendar Option 1; Mr. Saviano seconded.

The motion passed with a vote of 8-1, with Mr. Ramos dissenting.

IV. SUPERINTENDENT'S REMARKS

A. Monthly Budget Update

Dr. Brice provided the monthly budget update through the end of March, 2020, which shows the district's spending of salary, benefits, contracted services, supplies and materials, equipment, and debt service. Because we do not have people physically in buildings, it is clear that we are going to have cost savings. However, we do not know the impact of those savings as of yet. The decrease in supplies and cost of contracted services show if you compare costs from the end of February, 2020, to the end of March, 2020. The money savings at the end of this year would be voted on by the school committee to put back in fund balance at the end of the year.

Mr. Bradshaw stated that it was his hope to have a Budget/Facilities Subcommittee meeting in May.

Dr. Brice said he will work with Mr. Bradshaw and Chairperson Schofield to schedule a Budget/facilities Subcommittee meeting in May. Mr. Bradshaw stated he will work with his subcommittee members to find a date in early May.

Mrs. Ellsworth requested to get a report by summary of object code for the budget and will send follow-up questions she has to Dr. Brice.

Mr. Cabral asked about the decision at the last meeting to pay personnel until April 30th. Do we have to vote again to continue to pay district employees?

Attorney Carroll said that the vote was to pay district staff through April 30th. Any further action would need to be approved by the school committee and should wait until further guidance from the governor. The superintendent will continue to pay all staff until you tell him not to pay.

Dr. Brice mentioned that while we are paying staff, our custodians, TAs, and admin staff are working with administrators and staff on completing weekly logs showing the activities they are engaged in so we are able to articulate what they are doing with their time during distance learning.

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Custodians have been painting in the buildings and this may be money savings that we do not have to pay next year as it is being done this year along with looking at a furniture inventory we have in storage, book inventory and the cleanout of the Hugh Cole pod all have been started, etc. We are ahead of our summer cleaning and the incidence of overtime costs that occur in summer may be avoided with starting this work now.

Dr. Brice said that it would be his expectation once the furniture inventory was done, he would review and then present it to the Budget/Facilities Subcommittee to review and work on clearing the space.

Mrs. McBride stated that there are reports the school committee have been accustomed to receiving on costs within special education, budget, etc. and asked if these more detailed reports would be available to the school committee in the future.

Dr. Brice stated that he will work with the school committee and his staff on getting these reports in the future. He also mentioned that he has been very supportive of the work all our staff are doing in these very difficult times and we need to continue to be stewards of the taxpayers' money.

V. ADJOURNMENT - 8:02 p.m.

Before asking for a motion to adjourn, Chairperson Schofield reminded everyone about “Be the Light” to celebrate and show support for our Class of 2020 as well as first responders, medical personnel and senior citizens this evening by shining lights in your windows and celebrating from the safety of your homes at 8:20pm for 20 minutes. Dr. Brice added that we all need to stay safe and the police department has informed district administrators that there cannot be a parade as it would be in violation of the governor’s directive of the stay at home order. Live coverage of “Be the Light” on the Mt. Hope High School was streamed via MHHS’s Instagram page: @mthopehs. Dr. Brice thanked Dr. DiBiase and her staff for their support of this event and the police for their support and work in keeping us all safe.

MOTION: There being no further business to discuss, Mr. Saviano made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:02 p.m.; seconded by Mrs. McBride.

The motion passed unanimously (9-0).

Respectfully submitted on this date of May 11, 2020,

John P. Saviano, Secretary
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