

NEW SALEM/WENDELL SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
THURSDAY, March 3, 2022, 7 PM – FINAL MINUTES  
Via Google Meets

Attending: [Beth Erviti](#), Anna Wetherby (minutes), [Miriam Warner](#), [Carla Halpern](#), [Elizabeth Devlin](#), Melinda Hazen, School Committee members; [Kelley Sullivan](#), Principal; Jennifer Culkeen, Superintendent; Caitlin Sheridan, Director of Finance and Operations

Swift River Staff: Anne Martin, [Christine Morin](#), Jenny Potee, Jennylou Powers, Jill Putala, Kelsey Alvarez, Michelle Wolfe, Patty Savage, Rachel Vitello, Robyn Vitello, Samatha Marsh, Samm Osborne, Tina Newman, Ciji Cody, Tylor McCallumore, Lisa Aubin

Public: Anan Zorba, Dara LaPlante, Jessica Morris,, Melissa Burke, , Sarah Vular, Dominic Poli -Greenfield Recorder, Anna Seeger, Heather Willey, Jack Radner, Kari Loomis, Megan W, Rebecca Burnett, Nicole Burton, Chelsea Torchia, 3 others not identified by name

Meeting called to order at 7:01

## B. Public Hearings

- Mask Mandates - if the School Committee takes no action, the school policy is to follow the recommendation of DESE
  - Gosia Spooner - feels like she has had enough and has failed her child and the students in the classroom. Feels like it has been 2 years of trying to convince school committee members that their own mental health is less important than keeping triple vaccinated adults safe. Please let the children show their faces and trust the parents to keep their children safe. Aligning and not aligning with the CDC is not helpful. The ventilation system has been updated. The kids are lacking spark
  - Jen Potee, public health nurse for New Salem - New Salem BOH voted to remove the indoor mask mandate on March 1. As a public health nurse, is concerned that the return from break has raised and recommends the need for masks inside for 2 full weeks (until March 14)
  - Anna Wetherby - Wendell has not officially lifted the mask mandate
  - Anna Seeger - is concerned about the transmission rate map for Franklin County. Encourages masks until the level comes down.
  - Heather Willey - shares similar feelings as Gosia. There is fatigue with wearing masks. The logic of having it be optional is there ok but is confusing if the town lifts the mandate and the school does not. People will want to continue to wear masks, and those who don't will need to learn to be considerate. Need for logical decision-making that is clear.
  - Anne Martin (school nurse) - hears the feelings of the public. Waiting two weeks who may have been exposed will not test positive for several days. Only 1/3 of the students at Swift River are vaccinated. Would feel stronger about lifting the mask mandate if the vaccination rate was higher. Four weeks without any positive tests. There will be repercussions that we can not anticipate. As a community, it would be better if we could be doing everything else to make non-masking a safe reality. The students are suffering mentally. Getting rid of them now just because they are tired isn't the best when one more week could make things safer.
  - Carla - hears the concerns raised about mental health
  - Jack - in favor of lifting the mask mandate - other schools in Franklin County are lifting the mandate around the 14th. Vaccination study - vaccines in the 5-11-year-olds are only about 12% effective
  - Heather - two weeks is not a long time to wait but people travel throughout the year. The logic is that the mask protects you. People who do not need to take precautions are being forced to wear masks and that is illogical.
  - Jen Potee - Swift River is very lucky to have a nurse like Anne Martin. Is willing to help organize a COVID clinic which is what it seems Wendell and New Salem need. We are still in the pandemic. The School committee needs to be able to shift quickly if necessity prevails, such as in the fall or winter or when a new variant emerges.
  - Dara LaPlante - her child feels that wearing a mask is like torture and he feels it is hard to hear him and he has a hard time hearing his teacher.

- Carla - all the members of the school committee take the safety and health of the entire Swift River community very seriously (staff, students, families)
- Gosia Spooner: Interest in becoming a school committee member
  - Current staff are ineligible to serve on the School Committee

#### C. Warrants –

Swift River Warrants: 4035 - \$26,610.99; 4036 - \$26,681.22; 4037 - \$50.00; 4038 - \$225.00; 4039 - \$30,924.74; 8170 - \$93,669.18; 417 - \$84,606.29; 8171 - \$33,458.06; 8172 - \$42,513.01; 8180 - \$91,138.43; 418 - \$81,845.19

U28 Warrants:

2817 - \$2,255.26; 2818 - \$996.80; 817 - \$25,789.19; 818 - \$25,789.19

#### D. Superintendent's Report

- Working on budgets
- DESE is applying to the US Dept of Education -flexibility around reporting requirements on MCAS
- The leadership team has been supporting the Leverett community, who lost a 6th-grade student recently

#### E. Director of Finance and Operations Report

- Working on Windows and Doors project as money is still owed to the school through MSBA
- Hiring a new treasurer

#### F. Principal's Report

- 131 students
- Worked with Gillian Andrews 5, 6, and K teachers on the literacy curriculum
- Ongoing nature Professional Learning Community
  - Preschoolers and kindergarteners are rocking the outside education
- Masks and the pandemic have taken a toll on everyone and there is a need to support each other
- School adjustment counselor (funded with ESSER money) and school psychologist are working with students' mental health - both part-time and shared with Erving. Would love to have full-time positions filled

#### G. Committee Reports

##### o Report from Mahar Representatives

- Met with schools in U73 - meeting dealt with superintendent program and preparing for upcoming years
- Program of studies - how to sort a good schedule of programming so students can succeed in their desired programs to graduate
- Students creating a pathway that will center around their particular career path and not a generalized course load
- Thursday will be the vote for the mask mandate

##### o Collaborative for Education Services

No report

##### o Massachusetts Association of School Committees

- March 4 - lunch program on evaluation of the superintendent
- March 12 - charting the course
  - Recommendation to sign up if School Committee members have not taken the course
- Fiscal planning - budget, inflation rates - good to review
- Legislative agenda and committees to look at

##### o Budget and Personnel – Next Meeting – None at this time

##### o Joint Supervisory – Next Meeting – March 21, 2022 - 6:30 p.m.

- Glenn Koocher - will be attending, a recommendation for all to attend

## H. March Items

- o Draft of FY23 NSW Budget - Discussion and Preliminary Adoption of Budget - Vote
  - .75% increase only for towns because of Chapter 70, overall budget increase 2.84%
    - This is not level-funded budget but has projections for salary increases
  - Budgeting conservatively - not relying on School Choice to fund the budget
  - Beth moves to accept the preliminary budget as presented, Melinda seconds. Vote was taken by role: Preliminary budget passes with 5 ayes and one abstention
  
- o 2022 Swift River Community Action Award Recipient – move the item to next month, continue to think about nominees
  
- o 2022-2023 Academic Calendar - tabled to next meeting
  
- o Identification of School Choice Seats
  - Swift River will continue to be a school of choice but currently have no open seats
  
- o Home School Applications – Discussion and Vote
  - Beth moves to approve application 18, Melinda 2nds
    - Carla likes some of the curriculum presented, not seeing much math, only the workbook, would like to see more depth in the math curriculum before approving
  - Vote taken by role passes with 3 in favor, 2 abstain, one against
  - Beth moves to approve student 19 - Elizabeth seconds
    - Carla has a bias in favor of approving the application from personal knowledge of the family
  - Vote taken by role call - passes with one abstention
  
- o Face Masks – Discussion and Possible Vote
  - o Vote to Waive School Committee Policy: BGB Policy Adoption for the purpose of Editing Policy EBCFA – Face Coverings in one vote – Discussion and Vote
    - Edit and Final Vote on:
      - EBCFA – Face Coverings
    - Carla moves to keep mandatory indoor masking (school buses and in school) in place until Mar 14, 2022, Beth seconds (amended and seconded to include buses)
    - Survey results - the majority of parents seem to be in favor of lifting the mask mandate but allowing students remained masked on personal comfort level
    - Beth recommends that the mandate be lifted a week earlier (March 7th) than the motion
    - Elizabeth - being flexible - if there is a spike in cases, how to reestablish the mask mandate?
    - Jen Culkeen - the policy gives the superintendent control over interpretation and flexibility as to masking
    - Vote taken by role call - passes unanimously to lift mask mandate on March 14th
  
- o Policy Update and Review - tabled until April meeting

## I. Future Business

- o Next Meeting Date – April 7, 2022 – 7:00 p.m.
- o New Salem/Wendell Policy Committee – April 7, 2022 – 6:30 p.m.

## J. Approval of Minutes:

- o February 3, 2022
- Beth moves to approve minutes, Miriam seconds - passes unanimously

K. Adjournment - Beth moves, Melinda seconds - meeting adjourned at 8:23