

ROCKPORT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES OF August 13, 2020
Via Zoom

Chairperson Michael Kelley called the regular meeting of the Rockport School Committee to order at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom. Present were Nicole Altieri, Richard Drost, Michael Kelley, and Cathy Reilly, Colleen Coogan was absent. Also, present were Superintendent Robert Liebow and Recording Secretary Ingrid Keating.

I. Opening of Regular Meeting

Opening statement from Chairperson Michael Kelley:

Last night at our public forum, the School Committee had as a group its first exposure to the School Reopening Committee's proposal for this fall. The goal of last night was to allow parents and the School Committee to see the plan for the first time *at the same time* as a group. It was substantial time on task and I want to publicly thank all of the parents who attended and stayed on line with a long and detailed review of the efforts and recommendations made by the 29 person taskforce. It was grueling but if it is any consolation, a similar meeting in Gloucester last night ran until 1:30, so we did pretty well. I also want to thank the 29 members for their long hard work that resulted in a recommendation that -- no matter what was suggested -- would not please all parents.

Having seen the proposal, we now move to the evaluation portion of the process.

The emails we have been receiving since last night are roughly 70-30, 60-40 for and against the recommendation. In general, the most passionate correspondents tend to select facts that support their case and tend to dismiss all other factors. Some are accusatory in tone and resort to mild name-calling and overblown rhetoric -- a reflection undoubtably of the anxiety and frustration generated by the pandemic. We are, after all, only talking about a phased reentry heading towards a normal school environment and when it is safe to start each of those phases. The name-calling is not appreciated, but also not unexpected. No one listens any better while they are being yelled at, but we have made a point of listening regardless.

Anecdotally, in this small email sample, those that are closest to the pandemic are extremely supportive of a remote opening and those who are pandemic-adjacent and not actually dealing with COVID patients tend to push for opening. And then there are concerned parents supporting both sides of the discussion Many identify the calculated risk/reward of returning and had specific requests that would make the phases easier which we will try to incorporate into our planning. All letters were helpful to receive and appreciated. We will incorporate the feedback into our thinking as we will guidance from the Board of Health, CDC and our educators.

What came through in all these letters loud and clear was a passionate hope by all parents that things just get back to normal. And if it can't be normal immediately, that there be as much help as possible in supporting them through the transition to normal. We hear you. There are many people working hard to make this come together quickly. I have seen how hard everyone in the administrative staff is working every day to try and accomplish that this summer.

The goal of tonight was to allow any remaining parent comment to occur, should we not get to all them last night. We did get to all of them, but I am going to open up the floor in a minute if there is someone attending tonight who did not get to speak. The School Committee will then discuss what they have heard and their concerns. On Monday with a full quorum we will then continue the discussion and potentially vote. We will not be voting tonight or taking care of the regular procedural items normally on the agenda.

I recorded a number of takeaways (and maybe others did as well) from parents that we will be reviewing -- oversight in a time when we are all moving fast. I will also be encouraging the committee to think and discuss the opening outside of the polar positions offered by DESE. More about that when we get through parent comments.

Melinda Lima 100 Marmion Way, Rockport: Thank you to all of you for all the work and after hearing all the details is in support of the remote plan.

Chris Donato 146 Main St., Rockport: Feels the YMCA will be a great resource for the schools and will take a community to make all this work.

A. Approval of Minutes N/A

B. Personnel Actions N/A

II. Community Participation

A. Student Advisory Representative N/A

B. Public Participation

Jennifer Johnson 26R Fort Sq., Gloucester: parent and nurse for Rockport Schools supports the remote opening of the schools.

Lindsey Halverson 35 Stockholm Ave., Rockport is also in full support of the remote opening.

Harmony Stacey 143B Main St., Rockport: Thankful to the leadership and very happy as a parent and a teacher that Rockport will be starting full remote, with a safe and careful approach.

Nathaniel Kirby 51 Squam Hill Rd., Rockport feels it is a good idea to go fully remote. He understands the parents' concerns with challenges and is there any way to help support students with distractions and social/emotional support. Nathaniel suggests small group sessions with a staff member where students can voice their concerns.

Robyn Tibert 15 Jerden's Ln., Rockport thanks the reopening committee for all their work and is in full support of the remote opening.

II. Discussion and Recommended Action

A. Covid-10 Planning Update

The school committee members asked questions and received detailed answers from the Administrators. Topics included high needs students, students not engaging in remote learning, social/emotional concerns, in person leaning, connecting with teachers and peers, expectations, community volunteers, PPE's, Covid screening, HVAC, return matrix data, remote learning is not the ideal situation and will phase to a hybrid model when safe, getting clear messaging out to families, educating the community on safe habits, access to testing, tiering smaller groups into the buildings, scheduled mask breaks, advisory groups for students, what happens after a positive result, schedules, sports, family self-monitoring, and student ability to stay remote once the district goes to hybrid model.

B. YMCA

Amanda Tower, Andrew Fortini and Tim Flaherty, from the CAYMCA, set a plan to school to fill the gap in childcare needs. The YMCA has had a very successful summer program. The program would be held here all day at the elementary school gym and cafeteria in 10 person cohorts. The staff would help with remote instructions and there would be plenty of outdoor time with mask breaks. The Salem, Beverly and Haverhill YMCA Spring programs had about 250 school age and pre-school children, with no Covid cases. Cleaning and sanitizing is the same for outdoor spaces as inside and social distancing is in place at all times. The Y has developed 3 models to fit each reentry plan and will work very closely with the school to determine the high risk families who will require childcare and that social emotional needs are met.

Motion: Cathy Reilly motioned to support the YMCA plan to provide childcare as presented in the drive tonight.

Seconded: Nicole Altieri seconded the motion.

Roll call: Nicole Altieri yes
Richard Drost yes

