



**OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE REMOTE
SPECIAL BOSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**

May 5, 2022

The Boston School Committee held a meeting on May 5, 2022 at 5 p.m. on Zoom. For more information about any of the items listed below, visit www.bostonpublicschools.org/schoolcommittee, email feedback@bostonpublicschools.org or call the Boston School Committee Office at (617) 635-9014.

ATTENDANCE

School Committee Members Present: Chairperson Jeri Robinson; Vice Chairperson Michael D. O'Neill; Stephen Alkins; Brandon Cardet-Hernandez; Rafaela Polanco Garcia; and Quoc Tran.

School Committee Members Absent: Lorena Lopera; and Student Representative Xyra Mercer.

DOCUMENTS PRESENTED

Agenda

Meeting Minutes: April 27, 2022

Mission Hill School Equity Impact Statement

Mission Hill Emergency School Quality Review Report

Mission Hill Coffey Report Redacted

Hinckley Allen BPS Phase I Report Redacted 4 28 22

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Jeri Robinson called the meeting to order and led the pledge of allegiance. Ms. Sullivan called the roll. Ms. Lopera and Ms. Mercer were absent. Mr. Cardet-Hernandez arrived at approximately 5:55 p.m. All other members were present.

**Boston School Committee Remote Meeting
Zoom**

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Ms. Robinson announced that Ms. Lopera will not participate in the next several School Committee meetings while she attends to her health. She wished Ms. Lopera well and said that she looks forward to her return.

Ms. Robinson said that tonight's meeting was being streamed live on Zoom. It will be rebroadcast on Boston City TV. It will also be posted at bostonpublicschools.org/schoolcommittee and on YouTube. She announced that simultaneous interpretation services were available in Spanish, Haitian Creole, Cabo Verdean, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Mandarin and American Sign Language (ASL). The interpreters introduced themselves and gave instructions in their native language on how to access simultaneous interpretation by changing the Zoom channel. Translated meeting documents were posted at www.bostonpublicschools.org/schoolcommittee prior to the start of the meeting.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

Approved – On roll call, the Committee unanimously approved the minutes of the April 27, 2022 School Committee meeting.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Ms. Robinson welcomed everyone to the special Boston School Committee meeting. She recalled that last week, the district presented a summary of a report commissioned by the Superintendent and undertaken by the Boston law firm Hinckley Allen that outlines systematic and pervasive accounts of student-on-student sexual and physical misconduct that began as far back as 2014. The report concludes these serious incidents were not addressed appropriately by school personnel and confirm multiple systematic reporting failures by school employees.

Following an exhaustive review of the Hinckley Allen report, a School Quality Review conducted by School Works, and with careful consideration of all possible options, the Superintendent made the recommendation to the Boston School Committee that Mission Hill K-8 School permanently close at the end of this academic year.

The Committee has spent the past week reading the reports, attending meetings with the Mission Hill School community, and reviewing written feedback. Ms. Robinson thanked everyone who took the time to share their perspective on this very difficult issue. She thanked the Superintendent and her team for hosting three meetings with the Mission Hill community over the past week. She praised the district for taking a personalized approach to the student assignment process for students who are impacted by this decision.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

The following people testified regarding the Superintendent's recommendation to close to the Mission Hill K-8 Pilot School at the end of the 2021-2022 School Year:

- Lisa Graf, Fenway resident and Mission Hill K-8 Pilot School parent

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- Ruby Reyes, Dorchester resident and Boston Education Justice Alliance Executive Director
- Will Austin, Roslindale resident and Boston Schools Fund Chief Executive Officer
- Susan Vitolo, Roxbury resident and Mission Hill K-8 Pilot School parent
- Tim Klein, Jamaica Plain resident and Mission Hill K-8 Pilot School parent
- Asha LeRay, Roslindale resident and Mission Hill K-8 Pilot School parent
- Toyoko Orimoto, Jamaica Plain resident and Mission Hill K-8 Pilot School parent
- Allison Cox, Jamaica Plain resident and Mission Hill K-8 Pilot School parent
- Maura Smyth, Jamaica Plain resident and Mission Hill K-8 Pilot School parent
- Justin Rice, Jamaica Plain resident and Mission Hill K-8 Pilot School parent
- Valerie Carlson, Hull resident and Mission Hill K-8 Pilot School teacher
- Peggy Wiesenber, Jamaica Plain resident and Mission Hill K-8 Pilot School Governing Board member
- Carolyn Shadid Lewis, Jamaica Plain resident and Mission Hill K-8 Pilot School parent
- Seth Caughron, Jamaica Plain resident and Mission Hill K-8 Pilot School parent
- Edith Bazile, Hyde Park resident and advocate
- Shulamith Burke, Jamaica Plain resident and Mission Hill K-8 Pilot School parent
- Priyadarshini Kumar, Somerville resident and Mission Hill K-8 Pilot School teacher
- Meg Rotzel, Roslindale resident and Mission Hill K-8 Pilot School parent
- Ben Weber, Jamaica Plain resident and Mission Hill K-8 Pilot School parent
- Andy Crowe, West Roxbury resident and Mission Hill K-8 Pilot School parent
- Mike Heichman, Dorchester resident and former Mission Hill K-8 Pilot School parent

Deirdre Manning, Dorchester resident and Henderson K-12 Inclusion School parent, testified regarding school safety concerns.

Sharon Hinton, Hyde Park resident and advocate, testified regarding a number of educational issues.

ACTION ITEM

Superintendent Cassellius presented her final recommendation to close the Mission Hill K-8 Pilot School effective June 30, 2022. She initially made the recommendation at the April 27, 2022 School Committee meeting.

The Superintendent recapped the findings of the Hinckley Allen report, which by now you have all carefully reviewed, are impossible to ignore:

- Far too many children were harmed and few adults, whose job it was, stood up to protect them. Those who were courageous enough to do so faced a hostile environment, were retaliated against and/or marginalized for speaking out.
- Serial incidents of alleged sexual misconduct/assault and persistent bullying/harrassment occurred over time and the report makes clear that a number of school staff failed to follow established protocols to properly report such incidents and follow District protocols to prevent future harm.
- The school consistently ignored district policies, even in the face of directives to the

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contrary. These actions compounded the already significant impact of the alleged assaults on students and their families.

- Once notified of allegations of pervasive bullying and noncompliance with special education services, the Superintendent exercised her authority to remedy and prevent bullying and sexual assaults and improve compliance with special education and English language regulations through personnel actions, initiating two investigations and deploying additional central office supports.

- Even with these interventions:
 - Mission Hill K-8 Pilot School still maintains one of the highest rates of noncompliance with special education services within BPS;
 - The investigators found that students are still at an increased risk of bullying as a result of the pervasive school culture that has been built and allowed to continue for more than a decade.
 - This school culture allowed the egregious behavior to persevere and is fractured beyond repair; and finally,
 - The investigators found that, despite new school leadership and significant district office oversight and intervention, “the deleterious effects of the culture remain at the School.”

The Superintendent called for swift and significant action to immediately ensure the safety and well being of students and begin the healing process for the victims.

She reiterated that she and her team explored a range of options which included:

- Remove some or all school autonomies, excess staff, appoint an experienced school leader (and team) with a track record of success, and deploy central office support and oversight.
- Deploy an intervention team to make recommendations to the Superintendent about how to proceed
- Designate Mission Hill K-8 Pilot School as a Superintendent School where the Superintendent of Schools has authority to excess staff in consultation with the BTU and maintains all authority over next steps.
- Close Mission Hill K-8 Pilot School at the end of next school year, 2022-2023

After careful deliberation and discussion, the Superintendent concluded that none of these options would sufficiently address the persistent issues that continue to plague the school. Additionally, these options would not immediately remove the risk of future harm to our students or guarantee that each student receives the academic instruction, special education and English language services they are entitled to. Failing to immediately remedy the issues found in the report would also cause additional risk to the District and to the City.

The Superintendent acknowledged that the alleged incidents detailed in the report may not reflect the personal experience of every Mission Hill student or family, nor a full indictment of all staff members at Mission Hill.

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The next phase of the Hinckley-Allen investigation is examining the role of school and district officials to unearth individual and system-level responsibility.

The Office of Family, Student and Community Advancement has hosted multiple community meetings to address the following issues:

- Should the School Committee vote to approve the closure of the Mission Hill School, BPS will conduct a special registration round for students currently assigned to Mission Hill for next school year. This special registration round will run immediately after Round 2 concludes.
- School Choice forms will be emailed to families and delivered to the school for dissemination to families on Monday, May 9. Families will have from May 9th to May 20th to enter updated school choice forms. Families that participate in the special registration round will receive updated SY22-23 school assignments by June 10th.
- Families will be able to complete the registration process via 1-on-1 school choice counseling sessions, remotely or in person at any of the four Welcome Centers, plus a satellite registration site located at the Mission Hill School.
- The BPS Assignment Team will closely monitor student registrations during the May 6th to May 20th registration period and connect with families who have not submitted school choices to assist them with completing the process.
- The Planning and Analysis Team has conducted analysis to ensure there will be ample available seats and options for families. Even still, BPS will make additional seats available for Mission Hill students at high quality schools in order to ensure families have robust options. This will include adding seats within classrooms and in select instances where physical space permits and demand indicates sufficient interest, could include adding additional classrooms.
- The Office of Family, Student and Community Advancement will work 1-on-1 with families to help them find a good placement for their child. We know this is difficult and we are committed to partnering with families in the process.

Mr. Cardet-Hernandez expressed support for the Superintendent's recommendation, describing the school's failure to protect students as egregious and questioned the district's oversight. He pledged to use his role on the Committee to push for continued answers and actions and offered his condolences to all of the students and families who have been impacted.

Ms. Polanco Garcia strongly condemned the situation and encouraged the district to provide social emotional support for students.

Dr. Alkins spoke about the difficulty of the recommendation given the commitment to equity upon which the school was founded. He predicted that the totality of negative experiences is not yet known, noting that 56% of LGBTQ students do not report incidents of abuse and discrimination. He expressed support for the Superintendent's recommendation and called for additional support for impacted families.

Mr. Tran expressed support for the Superintendent's recommendation and spoke about the importance of acting in the best interest of children.

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Mr. O'Neill acknowledged the challenges of transitions and thanked the Superintendent for considering all options. He expressed support for the Superintendent's closure recommendation. Mr. O'Neill requested more details on the support being offered to Mission Hill families. Deputy Superintendent of Academics Drew Echelson spoke about the coordination of counseling services with the behavioral health team, transitional support, and a special assignment process to place families. Acting Chief of Family and Community Advancement Denise Snyder explained that holding a special assignment process would provide Mission Hill K-8 School families with a much better opportunity to meet their needs than if the district were to extend the Round Two registration period.

Mr. Cardet-Hernandez requested clarity regarding next steps. The Superintendent explained that the next phase of the investigation examining the actions of school and district personnel is expected to wrap up the first week of June. She will share those findings with the School Committee and make recommendations for systemic changes. She added that three positions have been posted for the creation of a new Risk Management Office. The Superintendent said she will work with the Office of the Legal Advisor to determine what information she can share about personnel. She pledged to bring forward operational recommendations for systemic remedies.

Ms. Robinson thanked the families who came forward for their courage. She spoke about the difficulty and pain of school closure and called on the district to provide mental health support for families.

ACTION ITEM

Approved - On roll call, the Committee approved the Superintendent's recommendation to close the Mission Hill K-8 Pilot School effective June 30, 2022. Ms. Polanco Garcia abstained. All other members voted yes.

NEW BUSINESS

Dr. Alkins requested that the Committee receive a future update on the school safety concerns raised during public comment. The Superintendent agreed to follow up.

ADJOURN

Approved - At approximately 7:13 p.m. the Committee voted unanimously, by roll call, to adjourn to the meeting.

Attest:



Elizabeth Sullivan
Executive Secretary