



Haverhill Public Schools - School Committee Hybrid Special Meeting Minutes of April 4, 2022

Roll Call - Pledge of Allegiance.

Mayor Fiorentini, Chairperson called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm and requested a roll call of the members:

Attorney Rosa	Present in person	Ms. Sullivan	Present in person
Mrs. Ryan-Ciardiello	Present in person	Attorney Magliocchetti	Present in person
Mr. Wood	Present in person	Mrs. Sapienza Donais, Vice Chair	Present in person
Mayor Fiorentini, Chair	Present in person		

Dr. Margaret Marotta, Superintendent of Schools was present remotely and Mr. Michael Pfifferling, Assistant Superintendent were present in person.

Mayor Fiorentini, Chairperson read an act relative to extending certain COVID-19 measures adopted during the state of emergency was signed by Governor Baker and allows for remote meetings and hearings by public bodies through July 15, 2022. This meeting will be available via live streaming over HCTV and WHAV. The full meeting recording will be posted on the HCTV website.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by the attendees.

Mayor Fiorentini offered the following statements (which had been shared with the most members of the school committee) on the recent event at Haverhill High School:

Thank you all of you for being here this evening. I am certain I speak for everyone when I state that fighting and behavior that happened last week at the high school was totally and completely unacceptable to all of us. We know that parents throughout the city are concerned. We share those concerns and changes must be made. We applaud the quick actions of the superintendent in moving her office and other administrators' offices to the high school. We need to send a very strong message that fighting is always unacceptable and that offenders must be dealt with strictly and repeat offenders must be removed from the high school. The overwhelming number of students come to school to learn and to do the right thing every day. We need to find ways to empower those good students and other schools in the area and country are implementing bystander training, and I urge the administration to implement that here.

We have security cameras everywhere and we do not need or want our students videotaping other students who are fighting or misbehaving. For those parents who say that their kids should have a right to carry cell phones and take video tapes of these incidents. This does not help the situation; it only encourages misbehavior and some only do this to be on social media. Ask yourself this question. If your child were being attacked, would you want the other students to stop the fighting or stand on chairs and tables cheering on the attacker and videotaping it? The answer is simple.

Our role tonight is not to throw gasoline on a fire, nor is it to minimize the seriousness of this incident. Our role is to gather the facts, to listen to the principal and the superintendent on what occurred, and then to work with the administration to come up with solutions. Our goal is simple—keep your kids safe.

We will begin by hearing from the superintendent and her team to summarize exactly what occurred last week, then we will hear from the public, followed by the superintendent outlining the plan going forward, the school committee members will then have an opportunity to offer remarks, with that, let me turn this over to Dr. Marotta.

Superintendent's Report on recent events at Haverhill High School.

Superintendent Marotta was appalled by the events. She recognized the intervention of staff members who wanted to publicly thank the following people

Victoria Lu	Magdalene Kwakye	Douglas Russell
Michael Warren	Christian Cano Molina	Katherine Vozeolas
Elsa Guzman	Christian Guzman	Dianne Connolly
Adalberto Hernandez	William Mears	Scott Brouillette
Sophie Rodriguez	Maureen Irons	Adam Scott
Elizabeth Bertoni	Jennifer Peterson	

The Superintendent acknowledged these staff members efforts in trying to keep all students safe including those students who unfortunately bad decisions. She stated that it was incumbent upon the district to teach students how to act better in these types of situations and what tools to use to make better choices.

Dr. Marotta stated that there was a fight between two female students that lasted approximately 60 seconds, at which time within 2 minutes, staff interceded and the students were separated and placed in separate holding places and shortly thereafter, the police began their investigation (a knife was found but was not involved in the altercation). She noted that the weapon on school grounds was an expellable offense and the proper discipline protocols were being followed in this matter.

Public Comment.

Ms. Ruby Kimball, 35 Dudley Street, Haverhill, an HHS Senior commented that bad students were running the school and the conditions had deteriorated over the past few years. She related that Principal Meland was soft on discipline. She noted her unpreparedness for college and described her high school experience as a subpar education. Ms. Kimball also related the inability to get counseling services. She commented that Dr. Marotta was to blame for many of these issues and that Covid was not an excuse.

Mr. Bob Dion, 14 Mitchell Barrett Lane, Bradford, MA, a parent of both high school graduates and a current sophomore spoke in support of immediate action to deter these types of incidents.

Ms. Brittany Quintana, 54 Green Street, Haverhill, MA, a mother of a freshmen student demanded immediate action and change. She stated that her son had been negatively affected by incident. Ms. Quintana related that today was the day to make change and ensure a safe school environment.

Ms. Sara Hilinski, 107 Webster Street, Haverhill, MA, a mother of a freshman student disagreed with intervention by students and stressed the importance of supporting teachers. She recommended tougher sanctions for behaviors.

Ms. Amy Towler, 29 Victory Avenue, Haverhill, MA, a junior at HHS, reported that there was no lockdown at the school. She noted that there had been no Alice Training since fall 2019 and additionally there were no recent hold in place drills. Ms. Towler did not feel safe in school.

Continuation of Superintendent's Comments.

Superintendent Marotta indicated that there was ongoing Alice Training, however, the pandemic and staffing shortages has impacted the drills. She offered that there were staffing shortages which is the reason she along with many members of her administrative staff have been assigned to the high school. The superintendent reported that efforts had been put in place to dissuade hallway wandering and incidences have been decreased over the past few days due to students being immediately dismissed to a parent. She noted that a review is underway regarding other educational options for students who are not successful at HHS, including the Gateway Program and Phoenix School.

Principal Meland spoke about the many interventions that had been started to make a safer learning environment.

School Committee Discussion/Comments/Actions.

Mrs. Ryan-Ciardielo asked about the interventions that had been implemented since last fall's fights, in particular the new cell phone policy approved in December, 2021. She did not approve videotaping of fights by students.

Mrs. Sapienza Donais remarked on her visit to the high school today and the positive experience, but wondered about the sustainability. She was concerned about security guard absences and its effect on student discipline. Mrs. Sapienza Donais inquired about consequences for students who both filmed, cheered, and encroached on the fight.

Mr. Meland responded that the process of identifying students in an ongoing endeavor.

Mrs. Sapienza Donais queried about fall school planning and staffing issues.

Principal Meland related that teaching shortages are a major problem along with the implementation of aggressive hiring practices.

Dr. Marotta offered the results of teaching shortages was the lack of hall monitoring.

Mrs. Sapienza Donais recommended uniforms for security guards which improves visibility.

The high school principal described the attire for security guards which was a black polo shirt with school logo/security along with khaki pants.

Ms. Sullivan was extremely concerned about violent actions and the lack of empathy/care. She suggested a larger conversation on the issue.

Remote Public Comment.

Ms. Carol Ireland supported increasing the security guards' salaries. She noted that lack of empathy and community not just in Haverhill but throughout the country and did not know the solution. Ms. Ireland offered restorative justice and/or peer review. She encouraged dialogue to help in the healing and noted that students were exposed to violence.

Ms. Kat Everett, thanked administrators and teachers for efforts. She spoke initially back in 2015 about restorative justice and was told there were no incidences of violence. Ms. Everett suggested on a community-wide approach to address these matters. She recommended a wholistic approach.

School Committee Comments.

Attorney Magliocchetti was surprised to hear those teachers were teaching an additional class and, in some cases, outside their certification. He supported hiring of interventionists.

Dr. Marotta responded that there were many open positions. She indicated that there were many contributing factors such as, stress and burnout.

Attorney Magliocchetti noted that expulsion is a consequence when a weapon is involved in the incident. He commented that the superintendent, principal, police chief and school resource officer are following the law. Attorney Magliocchetti stated the problem was with the laws and its impact in Haverhill. He believed there was good leadership in the city, but the legislators needed to review the laws since it was a core issue. Attorney Magliocchetti stated that the issues in the classroom could be addressed by the school committee.

Mr. Wood was appalled that a student needed to be taught not to hurt another student and there was no excuse for the behavior. He opposed the 2017-2018 law which detrimentally impacted the effectiveness of the school resource officers and did not agree with restorative justice approach. Mr. Wood noted it was a sad day when students did not feel save at the high school.

In response to Mr. Wood's comment lack of enforcement of hall violations, Mr. Meland reported that in the past few days there was a zero-tolerance policy.

Mr. Wood wondered if there was a disconnect in communication. He was beyond disgusted in the behavior.

Attorney Rosa was heartbroken for all parties and suggested broadening the discussion. He highlighted the disrespect prominent within the high school.

Principal Meland responded that the student was suspended for the remainder of the day with re-entry (with a parent) plan.

Attorney Rosa asked if student apology to an adult was a requirement of the re-entry.

Mr. Meland agreed with that statement and the conversations may include either a written or verbal apology depending on the circumstances.

In relation to Attorney Rosa's question on in-house suspension, Mr. Meland stated that the student was in a classroom and has access to coursework.

Dr. Marotta explained three responses: 1) thank you for letting me know (90+%) and that will never happen again; 2) no call back and 3) not my child you have the wrong kid. She related that this was an issue.

Attorney Rosa commented that the school committee action last fall may not have been a severe enough punishment. He asked about the cell phone bag.

Superintendent Marotta recommended a pilot of the bag with students who had offenses.

Attorney Rosa asked about the expansion of the Gateway Program.

Dr. Marotta described 6,000 sq. feet was needed for a 150-student program.

Public Comment.

Mr. Dale Leone commented that restorative justice was an important solution. He related those punitive actions did not alleviate the behaviors.

Ms. Katie Dinges, a community member observed the reactive action of the school committee and advocated for a proactive approach. She stated that this topic was a community problem. Ms. Dinges noted that punishing kids was not a solution. She commented on the violent culture in our schools.

School Committee Discussion.

Attorney Rosa asked about the outside counseling services and the lack of resources. He asked about the widespread issue of the problem.

Dr. Marotta described about the mental health crisis that was impacted by lack of mental health beds in our hospitals and its influence on our schools. She concluded it was a major problem.

Mrs. Sapienza Donais asked for a follow-up report at the next meeting.

Mayor Fiorentini was concerned with the student's comment on the lack of education at HHS. He did not believe the issues resulted from COVID. The mayor noted the reactivation of the Student Advisory Council and would work with Mr. Meland. He announced that there would be a Student Mental Health and Recreation Committee.

Mr. Wood asked for any authorization that the superintendent would need this evening.

Dr. Marotta responded that a third-party to fill security guard vacancies might be an option due to the difficulty in filling open positions.

A motion was made by Mr. Wood to explore filling the vacant security guard positions with a third-party agency until the end of the school year. Attorney Rosa seconded the motion. A roll call vote was requested:

Attorney Rosa	Yes	Ms. Sullivan	Yes
Mrs. Ryan-Ciardiello	Yes	Attorney Magliocchetti	Yes
Mr. Wood	Yes	Mrs. Sapienza Donais, Vice Chair	Yes
Mayor Fiorentini, Chair	Yes		

7 members voted in the affirmative Motion passes
0 members voted in the negative
0 members abstained

Attorney Magliocchetti stressed the importance of teachers and interventionists' positions.

In response to Mrs. Sapienza Donais' question on school choice students, Dr. Marotta responded that the students were considered Haverhill students and would be disciplined in the same manner.

Mayor Fiorentini suggested that at the next meeting a plan be brought to the school committee regarding the high school issues.

A motion was made by Mr. Wood to adjourn the meeting (8:40 pm). Mrs. Sapienza Donais seconded the motion. A roll call vote was requested:

Attorney Rosa	Yes	Ms. Sullivan	Yes
Mrs. Ryan-Ciardiello	Yes	Attorney Magliocchetti	Yes
Mr. Wood	Yes	Mrs. Sapienza Donais, Vice Chair	Yes
Mayor Fiorentini, Chair	Yes		

7 members voted in the affirmative Motion passes
0 members voted in the negative
0 members abstained