

Westhampton Board of Health Emergency Remote Meeting Nov. 15, 2020

1. Pursuant to Mass. General Laws Chapter 30A, section 20 (b) of Open Meeting Laws, the Board of Health held an emergency meeting to make recommendations to Schools for the immediate coming week in response to COVID-19.

Meeting called to order at 1:06 PM

In attendance: Board: Roberta Armenti (RA), David Blakesley (DB), Tom Martin (Chair) (TM), Health Agent: Mark Bushee (MB). There were up to 57 others in attendance. Listed here are the ones who spoke: Deane Bates (DBS), Collin Black (CS), William Broaddus (WB), Peter Cleary (PC), Tom Cleary (TC), Stephanie Faas (SF), Dale Kasal (DK), Brigid O'Riordan (BO), Kristen Smidy (KS)

Tom Martin (TM) introduced the Emergency meeting and provided that the purpose of the meeting was to provide immediate guidance to the Westhampton Elementary School and Hampshire Regional High School pursuant to continued operation of our educational institutions given the recent developments of COVID cases in our community. As of last Thursday, there were no positive cases in town. As of Sunday, Westhampton has 5 positive cases of COVID-19 in three households. Four of the five cases are in two households, which are related and work together in a small business. The business is closed for now and the families are isolating. They are not connected with the school. The fifth case is isolating and contacts are isolating and are being traced. This person is somewhat connected with the school, but not employed by the school. Eight close contacts have been identified and are quarantining and have been encouraged to be tested. Two of these quarantined people have ties to the New Hingham school.

The Board (RA and DB) added remarks about how the recommendations have helped, schools have been doing a good job, and, so far, we've been fortunate.

SF, as head of school nursing, remarked on how grateful she's been to Connie Schwaiger for all her help and has been in constant contact with her. She is carefully watching the situation in Goshen/Chesterfield.

DBS says the system has been working well thus far. The MOU with the teachers' union says we have reached the Hampshire County metrics limit, but otherwise things are running well.

KS feels the school doesn't appear to have hit the metrics to warrant a short term closure.

TM asks schools to please follow the Board of Health's initial recommendations and to relay that message of safety protocols strongly to the school communities. He stresses that modelling among faculty and staff is very important (i.e. distancing, mask wearing.) He feels that

transportation has been a key point of vulnerability in the school system. He states strongly that if a staff member or student feels ill in ANY way, they should stay home.

DB stress that all members of the school community should now be paying more attention now that there is an up-tick in cases. He doesn't agree with the DPH's and DESE's definition of a "close contact," but that is what we have to go on for now. He states again, we have been very lucky.

RA agrees with DB about the definition of "close contact." She also stresses that transportation is a weak part of the school system and now that we have the money, both the elementary school and the Regional school should make sure that bus monitors be hired and on the buses as soon as possible. She feels that more education from the schools to homes about masks, distancing and cleaning should be in place.

TC asked for clarification of the role of Board of Health in how schools decide whether or not to close or why they need recommendations. He is concerned that it puts a conflicting message among all the players: School Committee, Administration, Staff.

TM answered that the Board was not an overarching authority and could not force a shut down, but rather acted as a co-equal partner with the School Committee, Staff and Administration in making decisions about whether or not the schools were in immediate risk. Under its purview, the Board was the only branch to have access to contact tracing and was needed to clarify the picture of transmission of the virus in the schools.

DB noted that the schools asked for the Board's recommendations; the Board did not force them upon them. They are meant for guidance and meant for the School Committee to follow as they wish. The Board of Health receives guidance from both DPH and DESE.

WB asked about the Regional's changing model and was anything being addressed about this.

TM said that recommendations were being worked on.

PC asked a number of questions surrounding the risk of spread of the virus to the WES. TM notes that there is always a risk when schools are open.

DK asked if the close contacts were being tested. TM said that they were encouraged to be tested and that they were quarantining for two weeks regardless of getting tested or the results of testing given the incubation period of the virus.

Discussion of metrics followed. CB spoke about their meeting and that besides metrics, they seemed to use common sense. MB said that as of last week, DPH has changed their definition of metrics depending on town or city size. TM says it seems to be a work in progress.

Both PC and BO let everyone know that there is a WES School Committee meeting on Monday evening at 7:30 pm.

SF questioned that since the metrics in Hampshire County is over, would there be school on Monday until a decision is reached by the School Committee. DBS said that there would be school on Monday.

Meeting adjourned at 2:20

Respectfully submitted,
Robby Armenti