MINUTES OF THE TEACHER/STAFF INPUT SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE CHESHIRE TOWN COUNCIL SCHOOL MODERNIZATION COMMITTEE (SMC) MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2020, AT 1:30 P.M. AT HUMISTON SCHOOL, CHESHIRE CT 06410.

Present
Jen Bates, Rich Gusenburg; Absent: Anne Marie Kemp
Staff: Dept. of Education Asst. Supt. of Schools Marlene Silano

1. ROLLCALL
   The Clerk called the roll and a quorum was determined to be present.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE
   The group Pledged Allegiance to the Flag.

3. INTRODUCTION OF PURPOSE OF INPUT SESSION
   Supt. Silano explained that the School Modernization Committee (SMC) was formed between the Town Council and Board of Education. There are a number of subcommittees within the SMC, and the Teacher/Staff Input Committee is one of them. Members of this committee are Rich Gusenburg, Chairman, Jennifer Bates and Ann Marie Kemp (SMC Chair). The goal is to gather information from the people who work in the school buildings on how to improve the school facilities. All meetings will be videotaped.

   Mr. Gusenburg gave a short introduction of the SMC and its mission to look at what should be done with Cheshire schools. The SMC membership includes three (3) Town Council and three (3) BOE members and seven (7) members of the community. He noted the Council deemed it important for full and open visibility for all meetings, so they are being videotaped. Over the next few weeks, the SMC will hold one of its regular meetings at each of the Cheshire Schools, with a tour of the school building, followed by discussion on pros and cons of each facility.

   The staff was informed by Mr. Gusenburg that the 2017 school proposal from the BOE did not meet success. The mission and goal of the SMC is to have a proposal to the Town Council and BOE in September for the November referendum…and this is an aggressive timeline.

   The issues of concern were pointed out by Mr. Gusenburg as follows:
   - Overall facility
   - Classrooms
   - Core facilities
   - Special Education
   - Parking and Grounds; Parent drop-off and pickup
   - Feedback on grade levels – Middle school 6 to 8 vs. 7 to 8; grade 6 at the elementary or middle school; 5 and 6 grades intermediate school; or any variation of the grade level structure.
4. COMMENTS FROM CHESHIRE PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS AND STAFF REGARDING SCHOOL FACILITIES

Tracey Hussey, Principal and PPS Director of Humiston School explained the alternative education program, which supports students struggling with educational and emotional needs. Humiston School is the alternate site for these students. It has a small teacher to student ratio, and staff hones in on meeting student needs.

The school has a core of four (4) full-time teachers, a Social Worker, English and Math Teachers (full-time), half-time Psychologist, One (1) Instructional Assistant, part-time P.E. Teacher in the morning, part-time Art Teacher in the afternoon, and special education support during this school year. Staff commented on the importance of maintaining the integrity of the program, and noted many of the students feel the high school is too large, overwhelming, stimulating and difficult for them.

Physical Plant/Humiston School – The education program at the school is an innovative way for kids to feel safe and comfortable. The facility is old and outdated, but staff tries to make it work, and custodial staff does a good job with what they have to take of the facility.

Environment – The school has a small teacher to student ratio; there is flexibility; students have access to the Social Worker and Psychologist; and, relationships are first and foremost.

Jen Beling, Teacher, highlighted some features of the facility. There are four (4) classrooms on one floor, and small gymnasium/art/health area on the second floor. The school day is six (6) classes every day at the same time; there is no rotation; it is the same schedule for each day of the week. The school cannot offer everything that is at the high school, but staff is working with CHS on new requirements for core classes. There are all levels of students within each class at Humiston.

Matt Leavenworth, English Teacher, commented on the Humiston students lack of ability to be successful at the high school. Humiston School has high success and graduation rate with its students, and many go onto post-graduate work. There are “technical” classes with staff working with CHS staff, and student schedules are scheduled accordingly.

Ms. Hussey informed the SMC committee that next year the school will have a part-time Business teacher and Language Teacher. She will be looking at space to house these new staff members.
Lower Level – this area houses the café and lounge; there is a system in place for hot and cold breakfast and lunch delivered to the students; this level also has the main office, Social Workers office, student tutorial space and a calm-down space.

It was stated by Mr. Gusenburg that the SMC wants to get a full picture of the Humiston School program to inform the community.

Ms. Bates asked about having the alternative education program in closer proximity to the high school, and even being on the same campus.

In response, Ms. Hussey explained there is continuum of services for these students at Humiston School. These students were struggling at the high school, continue to struggle, even about attending school, go through many interventions, and this school site is the end of the continuum. Students do not want to return to the high school campus. All students are identified as IEP.

Mr. Gusenburg briefly discussed and highlighted the BOE plan, which would close Humiston School, build a new middle school, move central office/Humiston to Chapman School. He asked staff to identify some of the needs for a newer Humiston facility.

Staff Comments
Students and staff like the smallness of the current facility
The high school is overwhelming for the students
Staff deals with students with anxiety issues
This type of facility breeds individuality, which is awesome for these students
With a small facility the students do not get lost
There is a familial feeling within the facility
The school provides a diverse program for kids to meet their challenges
The current staff has been together for 15+ years
The program has been in existence for 25+ years

Humiston School Wish List
Science Lab and Equipment – Jim Zagras, Science Teacher, talked about the need for a small and well equipped science lab/classroom. In the current program he has limited ability to do lab work with students; he goes back and forth to CHS for equipment; some used/older equipment has been given to Humiston for science course work; there is no safety equipment (i.e. hood, eye wash station). The issue has been discussed in the past but was deemed cost prohibitive and did not go forward.

Mr. Zagras informed the committee that CHS has invited the Humiston students to return to the high school for science lab work, but students do not want to go there…it is not a good fit for them.
Mr. Gusenburg stated the SMC will be working on a comprehensive plan to bring to the Town Council in September for referendum in November 2020. It is not certain SMC will make this time line. SMC is in the process of hiring a consultant to assist the Town in looking at the best ways to deal with the district facilities, and there must be consideration of what the taxpayers can afford. Whatever the plan will be, it will reach out over a few years. It could include a new school or renovations. The State of Connecticut has a higher reimbursement with a “renovation as new” criteria if a district does not want to build a new facility.

The students have a relax space for student meditation, and Ms. Hussey said the students have anxiety and need a calming place.

Amanda Giacondino commented on the third floor gym and its limitations…as students cannot run, throw a ball around…due to classes taking place underneath the gym. The school does not have enough space for student physical activities. Larger indoor and outdoor recreational space is needed for the students.

**Students** – there are 27 Humiston students; more female than male.

**Humiston** - does not have a PTO or PTA organization. There are no art or music rooms or equipment for these programs. Adapted materials are purchased through the special education funds for the students. There are no Smart Boards due to issues with ceilings and walls; there is asbestos in areas of the school; some new flooring was recently installed.

**Security** – Alicia Lemmon explained that there is no front desk as in other schools. People come to the door, buzz in, she gets their information through the phone system; it is not an ideal system as she is the only one in the office; there are no cameras on the side door; she has no visibility into classrooms and only parts of stair wells are visible with security cameras; there is a hallway security camera; there is signage to “come to the main entrance”.

**Windows** – the school has security shades installed on the first floor…staff and students can see out, but no one can see in…and a good job has been done in this regard. Some windows do not open, are hard to open and close.

**Nurse’s Office** – There is no nurse assigned to Humiston School. CHS will quickly send its nurse to Humiston to service students; if a student is ill they can rest on a couch in a teacher’s room.

**Drop-off and Pick-up Status** – Most of the students arrive on the Humiston School buses; there is minimal
drop-off or pick-up; and many students drive to school.

SMC Humiston School Teacher/Staff Input Committee Meeting
February 6, 2020   Page 5

Parking Issues – Mr. Leavenworth explained that issues are sometimes created, especially on Wednesdays, with a full parking lot. People from the Temple are using the BOE parking spaces, and other meetings are being held at the BOE building.

Library/Media Center – Humiston does not have a Library/Media Center. The students took a closet, brought in books and materials, and made a small center for their use. A center would be a much needed space for the students.

Technology – Students have access to Chrome Books; some use them and some do not want one; there is good Internet access for the school.

Facilities - Some of the female students created a video about “their bathroom” at Humiston School and sent it to Supt. Solan. As a result their bathroom was painted, floor sealed, and the girls decorated it to their liking. Now, the boys are undertaking the same type of task for their bathroom.

Ms. Hussey pointed out this is a good example of how the students feel about Humiston School and their comfort level. There is no designated teacher/staff bathroom in the school, so these facilities are shared with the students.

Furniture – The school has some newer chairs, tables and teacher desks, and new tables for the student lounge.

Supplies for Humiston run through the PPS Department.

Comfort Level w/heat and air-conditioning – Staff explained that there are heating and cooling issues; a thermostat set at 60 degrees generates 90 degree temps; the rooms have window air-conditioners (older units); there is no air-conditioning in the student café or lounge.

Mr. Gusenburg reiterated the fact that SMC will visit and tour each school in the district. The tour is open to teachers, staff and the public, and will be followed by a regular SMC meeting to include discussion about the site school.

Staff is invited to contact the SMC with communication to its e-mail address.

5. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Ms. Bates; seconded by Mr. Gusenburg
MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 2:15 p.m.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

Attest:

_________________________________
Marilyn W. Milton, Clerk