

SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING—January 27, 2010
Town Hall, Lower Conference Room

PRESENT

Dave Roberts, Chair
Margaret Connolly, Vice Chair
Thomas Ryan
Tracy Driscoll
John Healy
Kevin Coughlin
Joe Heisler

ADMINISTRATION

June M. Doe, Superintendent
Cynthia Kelly, Asst. Superintendent
Michael La Francesca, Business Manager

Convened: 7:00 PM

Adjourned: 9:20 PM

At the start of the meeting Chair Mr. Roberts expressed on behalf of the Committee, thanks to the folks in Dedham for the overwhelming support on the vote to construct a new school and to reconstruct the high school athletic fields. We want to thank everyone for their efforts. He acknowledged individual members of the committee as well for their extra help with the fields and meetings. All in all, a job well done.

SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE

High School - Mid year exams were a huge success. There was very positive feedback from both faculty and staff. The student body and faculty were very excited about the “yes” vote during the town election to approve the construction of a new athletic complex. Mr. John Halligan will present Ryan’s Story on February 1st. This is a personal story of Mr. Halligans’ 13yr old son who committed suicide as a result of bullying and youth depression. There are three presentations scheduled for that day: 7:45 a.m. for high school students, 9:30 a.m. for middle school and 5th grade students from each elementary school, and an evening assembly for parents and the community at 7:00 p.m. Thanks to Gail Kelly and Marge Bohan for their work to bring this program to Dedham. A special “thank you” goes to the Dedham Education Foundation for supporting this initiative. Channel 5 and Channel 25 will cover the event. Report cards will be issued on February 2nd.

Riverdale School-The annual winter dance for all students is Friday evening from 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. There will be a DJ, and refreshments. Non -perishable food items are welcome as a donation for the Dedham Food Pantry. The Riverdale PTO will be providing transportation for the grade 5 students to attend the Ryan’s Story presentation at the High School on February 1st. Grade One will visit Wheelock Theatre to see “Honk” on February 2, 2010. It is a family musical. The theme is acceptance of others who may appear different. Everyone should be welcomed, embraced and celebrated for their differences rather than feared or misunderstood. An assembly is scheduled for February 12, 2010 with Peter Reynolds. He is coming to Riverdale School to award certificates to the winning students of the *My Favorite Tree* contest which correlated to his book *Tess’s Tree*. This was sponsored by the Blue Bunny. He was very impressed with the turn of entries from Riverdale School and wants to acknowledge the great job that the students did with this contest. Mr. Reynolds will also do a short program for the students that day. We want to extend a very special thank you to Mr. Reynolds and everyone connected to the Blue Bunny.

Curran Center - The Full Day Kindergarten lottery was held on Tuesday, January 26. At this time we have a small waiting list for full day. Registration is on-going; if you have not registered your child for kindergarten, please contact the school. Next month, students at the Curran Center will participate in the ECEC Olympics. Students will complete an obstacle course and every child will earn a medal. A special “thank you” goes to parent volunteers Kim Rutherford and Joe LaValley.

Avery School - The Avery School students and staff would like to thank the Dedham voters for approving the building of a new Avery School. The students and families joined together with Representative McMurtry, school administrators and members of the Friends of Avery on Friday afternoon for a short celebration of the positive vote. We are excited about the possibilities a new facility will provide. Thanks to our P.T.O. for funding the transportation for 5th graders to attend Ryan’s Story at the High School. Over the next few weeks the Avery School will be offering MCAS Prep classes for our third, fourth and fifth grade students. These classes provide reinforcement of the work students are doing in class with their teachers. The MCAS Prep classes will begin in English Language Arts and be followed later with Math and Science.

Greenlodge School - The Greenlodge School has almost reached the halfway point in our reading incentive program, “Genre Bingo.” Students are reading books and recording the title on their BINGO card that matches the genre of the book. Completed BINGO cards earn a bingo ticket which is placed in a container in their classroom. Starting next week one ticket will be chosen from each classroom container. The winner will be awarded a brand new book. Books

will be awarded each week throughout the month of February. In March we will have a culminating assembly and the classroom with the highest number of completed BINGO cards will win an entire basket of brand new books for their classroom.

Oakdale School

Update not available

As a follow up to the Budget Sub-Committee meeting held this morning, a question was raised on increases that took place in Unit A employees. Mr. La Francesca provided a handout that showed the number of Unit A employees (187) who received an average of 3.74% increase in FY10. The minimum was 1.44% and the maximum was 19.03%. The percentages do not include longevity. Thirty-one teachers did not receive step, lane or longevity increases. In FY11, 178 Unit A employees will see an average increase of 3.27% with the minimum increase of 1.21% and the maximum of 6.35%.

CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Boosters will be hosting a championship banquet honoring the high school girl's soccer team for their championship season Monday night, February 1.

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE

absent

REPORTS

AP MMSI Program: Joanne McCormick and several teachers in the AP program were present as well as two students who shared their experiences with the program, the grant, and their Freshman Academy experience.

Students: Rebecca Barrett, Anthony Hage

AP Teachers: Dr. John Laflamme (and Freshman Academy), Louise Young (Science), Barbara Smith (Math)

The students provided a brief overview of their Freshman Academy experience. Anthony thought the Academy experience was helpful in that it challenged him to his full potential. He felt more prepared this year because of it. He felt it was an advantage during the year to be able to talk to each other about their struggles. The classes were very challenging, especially in the beginning. He also spoke on AP Biology. He's not sure the Saturday session has helped him in the course. He described the session he attended in November with Randolph High School.

Rebecca said the Academy helped her a lot. It was a big adjustment for her moving from the 8th to the 9th grade. Some students struggled more with the program than she did. The team approach was comforting, she felt she wasn't alone. She felt the AP session helped but the material covered was material she already knew. She is hoping they get some experience in what the tests are like in one of the other sessions.

Questions were asked on how they managed their work load and their involvement in extra curricular activities. Both responded they were able to manage their time and continue with after school activities.

Discussion: Handle homework load? You have to get rid of the distractions and manage your time well. The students were asked if sophomore year is as challenging. They said being in individual classes instead of a team is different. It is harder having other students and teachers in the classes. They both are more involved in after school activities this year than last year.

Dr. Laflamme addressed the question of changes created at the 8th grade level based on the experiences of the Academy team last year. A meeting was held at the end of year with 8th grade teachers about some of the issues they saw with Academy students in terms of what they needed to work on. Such as, independent work, vocabulary work, and how to lessen the distance between where they are in the 8th grade and where they need to be in 9th grade. They will be breaking up into content areas instead of meeting with the whole group. Several surveys were conducted during the school year to find out how much difficulty students were having in adjusting to what was going on in the 9th grade. A key feature in the Academy approach is the ability for the team to come together and discuss the individual student (this student is struggling in my class, what is he doing in your class) and then meet with the student, parents and make adjustments accordingly. Most students are making proper adjustments to work more efficiently. Two students dropped out of the program last year and to date no students have dropped this year. Dr. Laflamme stated this program has been an education for everyone involved; teachers, parents, and students.

Dr. Laflamme spoke about the AP English Grant. AP Literature was added to the curriculum in the senior year and AP Language in the junior year. The number of students enrolled in AP English classes has increased to a total of 52. Two Prep sessions have been conducted to date. All of these prep sessions are very intense training for taking the tests. During the second session students took a mock AP exam – multiple choice and essay. They will be scored and sent

back to them in March. Third session will be a debriefing and there are plans to bring in the teachers who scored the exams to come in and talk to students.

Louise Young spoke about the AP Science Grant. Dr. Kobierski is the lead teacher but she was not able to be here tonight. Their first session was on November 14th. This year there are three AP courses offered: AP Biology, AP Chemistry, and AP Physics. The labs that Anthony and Rebecca were referring to are very vital. There is such breadth and depth of material from the sciences; they are hard pressed at times within the school day to expose the students to all the materials. The grant money has been put to good use in the form of purchasing equipment and all students will benefit from these purchases.

Barbara Smith spoke about the AP Math Grant. AP Statistics and AP Calculus are offered at the high school. Over the past two years, the majority of students have scored pretty high on the exams. Taking on the AP Grant meant increased enrollments, which is a positive outcome. Unfortunately, it has resulted in overcrowded classrooms. A level one student entering an AP course can be compared to the 8th grader going into the Academy. It is a big jump for these students. One of the agreements in the grant is that students do not have the option to drop the class. Regarding the Saturday sessions, she cannot get her students to attend. They were able to convince about half of them to go, but lost half of the group at lunch time. The grant also targets to bring scores up from 2s to 3s. Our students are already at 3s. We want to achieve 4s and 5s. The next session is February 27th in Dedham.

The Superintendent emphasized the fact that Dedham has two lead teachers in the program. Dr. Laflamme was identified right away by the grant and has gone above and beyond to help Dedham High School. Dr. Kobierski was actively recruited as the Science lead teacher and we are very proud of this distinction.

Mr. Santamaria discussed the financial budget on the grant. Information was included in their packet. Matching funds this year was \$10,450.00. More money was spent on the science program this year. There are hidden costs such as bus transportation and meals.

A concern was voiced that the Academy concept has the potential of creating inequities in the 9th grade. We are here to make sure every student reaches their full academic potential. It is troubling when Dr. Laflamme described the outreach to students in the Academy program, and can we be sure that happens with level 1 and 2 students? Outreach needs to happen across the board. Discussion continued that this is a concern of parents that has been around long before Academy existed. We need to set a model for what the entire staff should be doing. Superintendent Doe segued on that comment that it would be her recommendation to team the whole 9th grade. It is a budgetary issue for us. She agrees with the school committee's position that we do expect parent to teacher contact when students are not performing to their optimum. Mrs. McCormick also spoke about parent access to PowerSchool so they can see how the student is progressing in any particular class. There is still work to be done in that area.

Eighth Grade Seminar: Presented by Joanne McCormick and Debra Gately.

Ms. McCormick talked about the guidance piece. Contained in the packets was information on what counselors are doing with students during second semester. She passed around a draft document from the guidance department which talks about their vision and goals for middle and high school students. Guidance works with students in academic, social, and career areas (as students and after high school). Every student from 6th to 12th grade has been logged onto Naviance. Currently we are working with seniors on the college piece and sophomores on the career piece. Juniors along with their parents received letters inviting them to come in and talk one on one with their guidance counselors on their specific plans and it will give us another opportunity to talk about this tool.

Principal Gately spoke on Math and Library sections of Seminar. A packet was sent to School Committee members prior to the meeting. The Seminar program is for Math, Literacy and Research. There has been a great deal of transition in this program. It is a work in progress. Mrs. Metzger is the Literacy/Research teacher for Seminar. She meets with the students 1 block a week. In the first term the students completed a research project, mini lessons on how to find a good book, silent reading portion, and journal writing. It is a building process to appreciate literacy skills. Term 2 which just ended, Seminar classes looked at projects that cannot be completed in its entirety through the science classes. They determined to focus on the concept of weather; skill based – how to take notes properly, creating the graphic organizer and a final project. The focus of 3rd and 4th terms will be social studies and math respectively. The Seminar math program works extensively to correlate the curriculum. Math is a level class. Within the Seminar class everyone is heterogeneously grouped. We need to look at the scheduling and make improvements to it. Discussion was held on the math section of Seminar. As it is currently scheduled three times a week, what is being done to address this? The problem is noted, but waiting until next year doesn't address the group of students this year who are not receiving any benefit. What can we do to address this? The new Acuity program has individualized instruction to address this area of concern. Discussion continued on looking at the program to make sure it is worthwhile to keep. This is an area of weakness and parents are talking to School Committee members about this. Principal Gately is looking at the program closely and states it is partly a personnel matter. If considering looking at Seminar and keeping the Math and having to level it, you would have to consider more personnel. There is one teacher

teaching 240 kids. Logistically, it couldn't be addressed properly. We are drawing up different options. Superintendent Doe emphasized Acuity is a new program that is an upgrade from the previous program. The teacher had to be trained in the program this year. Parents can have information on how their student is performing, because we have hard data and this is the data we will use to determine the program's success on the math portion. The goal is to address these concerns this year. The goal of Seminar in the next 5 years is to continue to challenge and strengthen student weaknesses. The Superintendent offered the 8th grade MCAS scores are not acceptable in math and science. MCAS enrichment programs are being offered differently this year as well. The Chair summarized the discussion that it appears there is a structure in place that needs some fine tuning in some areas, some major overhauling in other areas. It's difficult to put timetables on the restructure process, but there is a sooner rather than later aspect to this. We would like to schedule a follow-up toward the end of the year.

Mrs. McCormick stated they are already developing a survey designed to get feedback from parents and students on 8th Grade Seminar. It was talked about last week in Guidance. An important date, Monday, February 8th 7-8:30 in the HS café – college representatives from various schools (UMass Amherst, Bentley College, Boston College, and Suffolk University) to talk about college process, interviews (for Juniors) question and answer. Course selection process will begin shortly in the middle school and high school. Students will be choosing classes through Power School. AP Teachers will be speaking to students about AP courses.

Grading Changes Update: New grading and reporting systems are in place and going very well. It has been a smooth transition and we have received very positive feedback from various colleges on the changes. The standards for honor roll have not changed. Added A+ this year and PE and health classes are not counted to give a truer value.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

none

PUBLIC COMMENT ON ACTION ITEMS

None

MINUTES

Motion was made by Mr. Heisler and seconded by Ms. Driscoll, to approve the January 13, 2010 minutes. Approved: Unanimous with corrections and one abstention.

DONATIONS

None

OLD/NEW BUSINESS

The Chair asked permission of the committee to take this item out of order. Mr. Sal Ledda and Mr. Bob Stanley from Dedham Parks and Recreation Commission were present to take possession of Loewen Field. This field has not been officially dedicated. There was an agreement of the previous Loewen Field that the new field would be under the care and custody of Parks and Rec when built. The Chair read the recommendation of Superintendent Doe into the record: "To transfer the parcel identified as "Loewen Field" the currently fenced in softball field situated on the Middle School campus, to the Recreation Department with the provision that high school and middle school softball teams will be scheduled for use of the field on weekdays from 2:30-6:30pm and weekends as needed."

Motion made by Mr. Healy and seconded by Mr. Coughlin to accept the recommendation as stated. Approved: Unanimous

Bob Stanley spoke and said they are looking forward to taking ownership and getting it back on line. The Loewen family is looking forward to the dedication which will be scheduled toward the end of April, perhaps on Opening Day.

ITEMS FOR NEXT AGENDA

2/10 – summary of response to athletic surveys
Summer school initiative and credit recovery
Offer Science Elementary text – Committee recommendation
School Year Calendar for 2010-2011

The Chair announced the need to enter into Executive Session:

Motion made by Ms. Connolly, and seconded by Mr. Healy to enter into Executive Session under exemption 3 for the purpose of contract negotiations. Vote conducted by roll call: Mr. Ryan-yes, Mr. Coughlin-yes, Mr. Heisler-yes, Ms. Driscoll-yes, Mr. Healy-yes, Ms. Connolly-yes, Mr. Roberts-yes.

Open meeting adjourned at: 9:20p.m.