

# DEDHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

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**April 6, 2022**

*(Approved 4/27/2022)*

## MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Tracey White, Chair

Dr. Melissa Pearrow, Vice-Chair

Mayanne Briggs

Joshua Donati

Victor Hebert

Cailen McCormick

Christopher Polito

## MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE ABSENT:

None

## MEMBERS OF THE ADMINISTRATION PRESENT:

Michael J. Welch, Superintendent

Dr. Ian Kelly, Assistant Superintendent

Dr. Edward Gotgart, Assistant Superintendent for Business & Finance

Meeting Location: Avery Elementary School

Meeting commenced at 7:00 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

A moment of silence was held in honor of the passing of Retired Dedham Police Chief Michael Weir.

## **Public Comment**

April McCormick, 98 Gainsville Road (asked for her statement to be entered into the record)

I would like to make a brief comment regarding a statement posted on social media that was written by school committee member Ms. Briggs.

She stated "critical race theory is taught in law school only as a way to look at laws and inspect for bias. It is not in the Dedham public schools nor will it ever be taught in the Dedham public schools. Many parents believe they should have full control over what is taught in the schools."

I am here to tell you, parents don't want control. We are asking for transparency, honesty and forthright answers in what is being taught in the classroom.

She continues to state "Any parent that has concerns can speak with their classroom teacher if they do not agree with what is being taught."

As you know in the past, parents have tried that and it didn't work out well for that family.

Her statement regarding critical race theory is erroneous.

If what you say is true then how come in the job posting for Dedham Public schools diversity equity and inclusion coordinator it states this person must demonstrate mastery of diversity equity and inclusion affairs including critical race theory, feminism and queer theory?

Critical Race Theory or as you call it, "Cultural Responsive Teaching" is taught in Dedham Public Schools. They are one and the same.

Thank you

Bernadette O'Connor, 46 Violet Avenue (asked for her statement to be entered into the record)

My name is Bernadette O'Connor.

I have recently learned most School Committee members are part of the Coalition for Equity and Inclusion, formerly known as the Ant-Discrimination group. Two members are vocal leaders of the Coalition's private Facebook page.

As elected officials, each school committee member should be representing all families and we should believe you have "positive intent" while serving the Town of Dedham.

This is not true. Instead, what I see is an abuse of power. You are using your elected position to push your own political agenda and ideology onto our school system and most disturbing our children - from hiring staff and creating new positions, budgeting "theories" instead of facts, to purchasing new curriculum and changing curriculum without any public feedback.

Our children are not a social experience. I urge you to refocus curriculum and associated material to core subjects of math, literacy, science, and history - and avoid social and political agendas, which alienate parents and divide our community.

Melissa Cidado - 138 Paul Street, asked the committee to review the DESE disciplinary data for Dedham.

Virginia Hickey 264 East Street, supports the DEI work in the schools, would like the Committee to formally adopt a statement by member Cailen McCormick, and requested the Committee consider hybrid meetings.

Andrea McElligott, 70 Country Club Road (asked for her statement to be entered into the record)

Good evening, my name is Andrea McElligott and I live on Country Club Road.

First I would like to congratulate Mrs. Clare Sullivan on her upcoming retirement and thank her for all her years of tireless work for the children of Dedham, the Avery School, and my son. Thank you, thank you, and thank you, and congratulations on a well-deserved retirement.

I am the full time working mom of 2 amazing children in the Dedham Public Schools, one at Riverdale and one who went through Avery and is now at the middle school.

When I spoke to this committee back in October 2021, about the stats showing our schools in decline, I heard nothing back from any of you.

Now, When a town election is about to happen I see a Facebook post from one of you addressing a candidates statements about these stats. 5 months after, me, a parent raised this exact issue with this board. Why is that the case? For me that does not read well.

When I hear 2 sitting members of this committee are part of some private Facebook group that are putting out recommendations of who to vote for in the town elections, including town meeting by Precinct, I have to question their unbiased commitment to service on this committee.

Especially when I hear they are endorsing a woman who made a blanket statement calling an entire group of residents “a convenient list of racist”, and another woman who gave the middle finger to another parent at a school committee meeting. If that is who you see fit to be an elected official in this town, I must question your judgment. I expect my elected officials to hold themselves to a higher standard and not create more division in this town.

All of this solidifies for me how deeply political this school committee has become. When parents concerns are ignored until it is an election season there is a problem. When school committee members only want people who think just like them, we lose all diversity of thought and ideas. When we have school committee members who believe an unrecognized private Facebook groups agenda takes priority over their position to serve on this committee we must reevaluate who we have elected to serve our children’s best interests. This is not what’s in the best interest of our children.

## **Superintendent’s Update**

*Superintendent Welch provided the following update to the Committee:*

Today was the 133rd day of classes for the 2021-22 school year. We have only 6 more days of school until our extended April vacation which begins on Friday, April 15 (Good Friday). Today was the final half-day for professional development during the 2021-22 school year. The schedule of professional development activities across the district can be found [HERE](#).

Much of our focus in the district has been on MCAS testing over the past few weeks. The testing schedule for the spring of 2022 is [HERE](#). The testing window opened with Grade 10 ELA tests on March 22, followed by ELA Session 1 testing for grades 3 & 4 on Monday and Tuesday of this week. The entire middle school will be testing this Thursday and Friday, completing both Session #1 & 2 on those days. All tests are full length this year (unlike last year when tests for Grades 3-8 were only half length), and all testing is completed online using Chromebooks. So far, the early returns are that the Grade 3 ELA assessments took longer than expected, but there were no real problems with test administration across the district. Gr. 3-5 ELA Session #2 will take place next week. Math MCAS testing for all students (2 sessions) will begin during the first week of May followed by Science MCAS testing for Grade 5, 8, and 9/10 in late May and early June.

Most schools have been having assemblies during the past two weeks with all students to go over the logistics and preparations for MCAS testing. I attended all three grade-level assemblies at Dedham Middle School to speak with students from each grade yesterday about the exam and its importance not only for individual students but also for the school, the district, and the overall community of Dedham. These students have not taken a “traditional” full-length MCAS exam since 3 years ago (spring of 2019). There were no tests given for any

students during spring 2020 (full lockdown), and partial tests given for grades 3-8 last year (spring 2021) due to the interrupted nature of schooling (partial weeks in person + remote learning) for all students. This year's exam (2022) will be used as a baseline for comparison in future years to determine student growth.

On Monday, March 28 members Budget Subcommittee Chair Victor Hebert and Chair Tracey White accompanied Central Staff members to present the [School Department's FY23 Budget](#) to the full Finance Committee. I am very proud of our work in assembling this year's budget, and the fine work of Sara Errickson in making this document tell a compelling story both visually and with dialog. I believe the FinCom appreciated our work also. It was clear that the overall FY23 budget outlook for the town is quite tight, and I have been asked to prioritize our request and identify possible cuts that may be needed based upon the Finance Committee's recommendation. The District Leadership Team will be meeting next week to discuss possible areas of reduction in the event this becomes necessary, and once the Finance Committee's deliberations have concluded, they will make a recommendation that becomes their advise to Town Meeting in the warrant. If any FY23 reductions are necessary, we will meet with the Budget Subcommittee to determine how and where these cuts will land.

The last two weeks have also been very busy with administrative search committees. Each day this week we are hosting full day site visits in the district with the four finalists for the position of Assistant Superintendent for Student Services. I expect this search to wrap up next week. As the Committee is aware, Jenny McGowan was recently appointed as the permanent principal at Greenlodge Elementary School, and the recent retirement announcement by Avery Principal Clare Sullivan will require additional planning and work to fill that position. Unfortunately, our recent search for a successor to HR Administrator Kathy O'Leary has come up empty because our chosen candidate backed out last week. We are restarting that search next week. Updates and timelines with important milestones for these positions are listed below:

[Assistant Superintendent for Student Services](#)

[Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance](#)

[Dedham Middle School Assistant Principal](#)

[Dedham High School Assistant Principal](#)

We have also been busy over the past few weeks integrating our new [ESD/ESY Director Alyssa Freda](#) to the district. She is present to discuss her entry to the district later in tonight's meeting. Alyssa has been working very hard to get to know everyone in the district and to better understand our current summer programming. She also worked very closely with Dr. Kelly on submitting a grant application to DESE for summer program fiscal support. We will hear back about this funding request in the next few months.

Our district COVID Coordinator Emily Kadehjian has continued her hard work each week conducting over 1200 pooled tests across the district. In addition Emily has begun to try and recoup some costs sustained by the district as a result of staff absences due to COVID. This state grant program requires considerable bookkeeping and tracking down of proof of positive tests, but so far she has done the necessary work to recapture more than \$70,000 worth of these costs. These reimbursements go directly to the Town of Dedham (not the schools) and we are working with Town Manager Leon Goodwin and Finance Director John Arnett to access these funds to offset our costs since Emily has done the hard work to obtain these state reimbursements.

Congratulations are in order to the Class of 2022 and the DHS Performing Arts company on their production of *Hairspray* at DHS on March 25-28. The production was a huge success and widely attended. I for one found the acting, costumes, music, and lighting very professional and the content was hilarious.

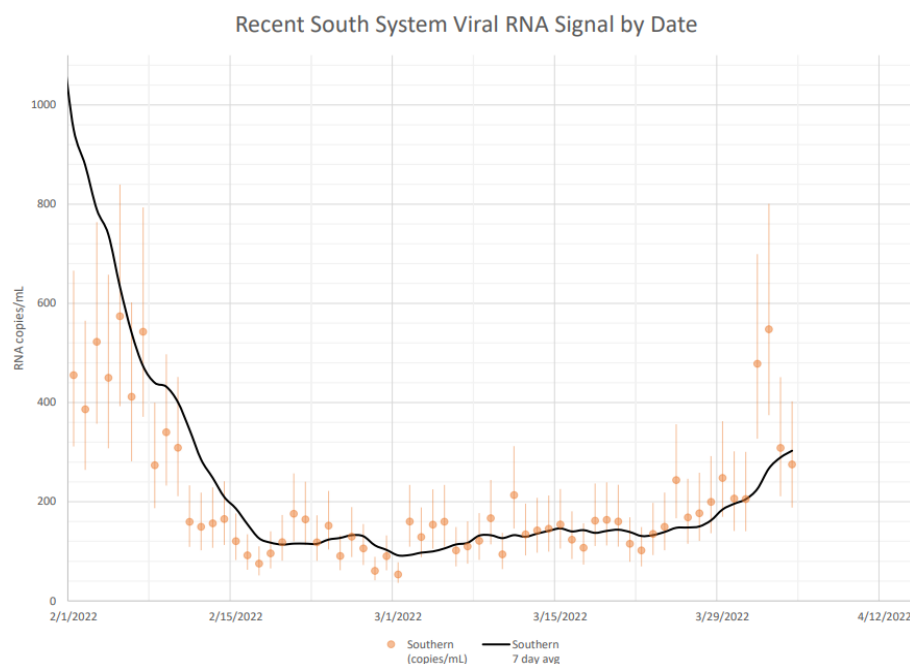
During the “old business” portion of the meeting I will be asking the Committee to vote to approve the summary of our [SOA \(Student Activity Act\) funding allocation for FY22](#). This is supplemental funding for schools similar to Chapter 70 funding that was given to all districts across the state. This was presented at our last meeting on March 16 with the expectation that the Committee would vote to approve these resources tonight.

## Superintendent's Covid-19 Update

*Superintendent Welch provided the following update to the Committee:*

In the three weeks since our last meeting (March 16), there has been a slow and steady uptick in cases throughout the Dedham Public Schools and in the greater Dedham community. This week's pooled testing at all schools showed fewer positive test results than our past few weeks' trending would have suggested. On Monday and Tuesday of this week we tested a total of **269 pools** that included **1337 individuals**. We received 5 positive pools out of those 1337 individuals for a percent positivity of 0.37%. 2 positive pools were at Dedham High School, 1 positive pool at Avery, and 2 positive pools at Dedham Middle School. There were **NO POSITIVE POOLS** from ECEC, Oakdale, Riverdale, and Greenlodge this week.

The slight increase in cases this week is consistent with reports of slight increases in schools across the state. Recent wastewater COVID-19 concentrations mirror this slight uptick also. This reading has proven to be pretty accurate in predicting future cases 2-5 days in advance. A graph of recent data from MWRA wastewater is shown below:



The most recent data regarding COVID cases in Dedham and the Dedham Public Schools are below:

[COVID-19 data for Town of Dedham](#)

[COVID cases in MA schools](#) (For comprehensive statewide results, click [HERE](#))

[Positive COVID Cases in DPS Schools](#)

[DPS Pooled Testing Participation and Results](#)

## **Reports/Updates**

### Introduction of ESD/ESY Program Director

The new Extended School Day/Extended School Year Director Alyssa Freda was introduced to the Committee. Ms. Freda is working to coordinate all enrichment and remediation programs across the district. Her position is currently grant funded.

### School lunch Program Overview

Food Service Director Jeanne Johnson presented an update to the Committee. The presentation is available on the [district website](#).

### 3rd Quarter FY22 Budget Report

*Interim Assistant Superintendent Dr. Edward Gotgart presented the following update to the Committee:*

As the third quarter comes to close, we are once again seeing that our FY22 Operating Budget is tracking nicely and there are no areas of concern. In the last quarterly report, we identified two areas of concern that we were watching carefully; the Special Education Out of District placements budget and the custodial overtime budget. We are pleased to report that neither of these remain a concern for the following reasons.

With regard to the Special Education Out of District budget, under the current state law, Dedham would be fiscally responsible for any student who moves into the district after July 1 but before April 1st:

“Notwithstanding the provisions of section 27C of chapter 29 or any other general or special law to the contrary, if a child with a disability for whom a school committee currently provides or arranges for the provision of special education in an approved private day or residential school placement, including placement in a pediatric nursing home pursuant to the provisions of section 3, or his parent or guardian moves to a different school district on or after July 1 of any fiscal year, such school committee of the former community of residence shall pay the approved budgeted costs, including necessary transportation costs, of such day or residential placement, including placement in a pediatric nursing home, of such child for the balance of such fiscal

year; provided, however, that if such move occurs between April 1 and June 30, such school committee of the former community of residence shall pay such costs for the balance of the fiscal year in which the move occurred as well as for the subsequent fiscal year.”

With the passage of April 1st, we are no longer fiscally responsible for this year and for next year as well for any such student who moves into the district during this time period.

With regard to custodial overtime, now that the DESE has relaxed the rules related for Covid, we have been able to resume the regular use of our cafeterias at our schools and brought back the cafeteria tables that were removed to ensure proper spacing. However, the substitute tables did require our custodians to clean many more items and that led to significant overtime as did the special cleaning and sanitizing of the entire school building, so this is no longer needed.

Water bottles no longer proliferate in our schools as we have restored the use of bubblers and installed filling stations at the Middle School as well. These changes have already resulted in a significant reduction of overtime expenses. While we were able to use the state’s ESSER funds to cover these costs, they were beginning to exceed what we had available in the grants and were beginning to charge the Operating Budget for these excess costs.

The remaining balances for the schools as well as for the district departments should allow us to meet our budget goals for FY22. While we may need to do some line item transfers at year end as we always do, they should not create any problems for us having a balanced budget at year end.

### Superintendent’s Evaluation

Dr. Pearrow provided the Superintendent with his yearly summative evaluation report. The report can be found on the [district website](#).

## **Subcommittee Updates**

### Budget - Mr. Hebert

None

### Communications - Mr. Donati

The next meeting will be in early May.

### Curriculum Advisory - Ms. Briggs

The next steps of the subcommittee will be developing ways to inform the community about important topics being discussed by the group.

### Policy - Dr. Pearrow

The Subcommittee met tonight to continue its discussion on Public Comment Policy and take into consideration the recommendations of the lawyer.

SBRC- Ms. Briggs

Next steps of the subcommittee will be working on writing and submitting SOIs for the Riverdale and Greenlodge Elementary schools to complete requirements from the MSBA.

Traffic - Ms. Briggs

None

Negotiations - Mr. Polito

Announced there will be a need to enter Executive Session this evening to vote on one contract. The group has also begun Unit A negotiations.

## **Donations**

**Motion**

Mr. Polito motioned to approve a donation in the amount of \$3,985 from the Dedham Arts Boosters to support:

- \$1,500 for student scholarships
- \$1000 for school buses for field trips
- \$800 for four elementary students to take private lessons
- \$450 for stipends for middle and high school band clinicians
- \$235 for art teacher supplies at DMS

Mr. Hebert second; no discussion; motion passed 7-0.

Ms. Briggs motioned to approve a donation in the amount of \$1,000 from an anonymous donor to support the Fine and Performing Arts Department at the discretion of the Fine and Performing Arts Director, Mr. Donati second; no discussion; motion passed 7-0.

## **Minutes**

**Motion**

Mr. Polito motioned to approve the minutes from March 16, 2022 as presented, Mr. Donati second, no discussion; motion passed 7-0.

## **Old/New Business**

Discussion and Vote of Statement of Interest Submittal for Greenlodge and Riverdale Schools

Superintendent Welch asked the Committee to vote on allowing him to move forward with submitting Statements of Interest to the MSBA for the Greenlodge and Riverdale schools. An affirmative vote by the Committee is required by the MSBA in order for them to consider any type of consolidation of schools.

**Motion**

Ms Briggs motioned to support Superintendent Welch completing and submitting Statement of Interests for the Greenlodge and Riverdale Elementary schools to the MSBA, Mr. Donati second, no discussion; motion passed 7-0.



### Discussion and Vote on Student Opportunity Act Plan

As part of the submission of the annual Student Opportunity Act Plan, the Committee is required to vote on the District's plan.

### **Motion**

Mr. Polito motioned to support Superintendent Welch submitting the Student Opportunity Plan to the Department of Education, Mr. Hebert second, no discussion, motion passed 7-0.

## **Acknowledgements & Announcements**

Ms Briggs recently heard Director of Health Services Maria Antonuccio speak at a state conference and wanted to thank her and all the school nurses for their work during Covid.

Dr. Pearrow thanked Ms. White for her work as chairperson of the board during this past year.

Ms. White stated the need to enter Executive Session under Exemption 3, to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining. She noted that the Committee would not be returning to open session. A roll call vote was taken:

Mayanne Briggs - Yes

Joshua Donati - Yes

Victor Hebert - Yes

Cailen McCormick - Yes

Christopher Polito - Yes

Dr. Melissa Pearrow, Vice-Chair - Yes

Tracey White, Chair - Yes

Motion passed 7-0

Regular meeting concluded at 8:33 p.m.