

SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING—June 13, 2007
Lower Conference Room, Town Hall

PRESENT

Tracy Driscoll, Chair
Margaret Matthews, Vice Chair
David Roberts
Thomas Ryan
Margaret Connolly
Joanne Flatley
John Healy

ADMINISTRATION

June M. Doe, Superintendent
Michael La Francesca, Business & Finance
Alan Winrow, Principal

Convened: 7:00 PM

Adjourned: 9:00 PM

Ms. Driscoll stated there was a need for a brief executive session under exemption three.

Mr. Roberts moved, seconded by Ms. Connolly, and it was so

VOTED: by roll call. Mr. Healy – aye, Ms. Connolly – aye, Ms. Flatley – aye, Mr. Ryan – aye, Mr. Roberts – aye, Ms. Matthews – aye, and Ms. Driscoll – aye.

The committee returned to open session at 7:30 PM.

Taken out of order.

COMMUNITY SERVICE HOURS GRADUATION REQUIREMENT

Mr. Winrow introduced Mr. Dellot, chair of the committee assigned to review graduation requirements. Mr. Winrow stated that overall the committee was satisfied with the current graduation requirements, but thought the community service requirement was inadequate. He said the goal of this requirement is to promote lifelong community service.

The proposal before the School Committee is to maintain the 20 hour requirement for next year's class. The following year the requirement would be 30 hours and the year following that would be 40. After these increased hours are implemented, the committee intends to examine the impact of the advanced requirement.

Mr. Jim Dellot stated that Ms. Chillemi, Ms. Pepin and Mr. Wolfson served with him on the graduation requirement evaluation committee. Mr. Dellot said the committee was in agreement to raise the hours to 40. He said they wanted to implement the 40 hour requirement before considering any requirements beyond that. He said they were concerned about students that also work part-time jobs.

Mr. Winrow commented that they would like to incorporate community service into the curriculum. He said he has spoken with Dr. LaFlamme about having students write about this topic in their English classes and would be working with Mr. Gould to introduce it into the social studies curriculum.

Ms. Matthews asked if there was student input in this recommendation. Mr. Dellot said he has mentioned the possible increase in hours to his classes and they are not happy with it. He said

there was conversation about in school time being counted, but it was determined it would not be appropriate. Ms. Matthews said that students in the Student Council welcomed it. Mr. Winrow said that it was important to have adequate staff to monitor the students' completion of the requirement. He noted that help with some school activities can count towards the requirement, and cited School Pride Day as an example.

Ms. Doe said she had student input from student leaders and they overwhelmingly supported the increase in hours.

Ms. Connolly said she would like to see a greater time commitment and an annual requirement. She added that she is happy with the advances but would like to see more. Mr. Winrow agreed it is a minimalist approach. He remarked that monitoring 800 students on an annual basis would be difficult.

Mr. Ryan asked what students did on School Pride Day. Mr. Winrow said students clean the exterior of the property. He noted that it coincided with the SAT, but it has still worked well. Mr. Ryan said he has heard complaints from parents about the soccer practice fields. He hoped the school could keep an eye on that issue.

Ms. Matthews moved, seconded by Ms. Connolly, and it was

VOTED: to accept the recommendation to change the graduation requirement.

INTRODUCTION OF NEW SOCIAL STUDIES DEPT. CHAIR

Ms. Doe introduced Mr. John Gould, the new Social Studies Department Chair. Mr. Gould reviewed his background and experience. He stated that he has taught at Quabog Regional High School for ten years. He stated that he holds two Master's degrees. He said that he has struggled as a student and believes that this has helped to make him a good teacher. He knows how to learn. He said he has taught at the middle and high school levels, as well as continuing education, and is a versatile teacher. He said he looked forward to teaching in Dedham.

Mr. Winrow said he would be a welcome addition to the staff. He is replacing Dr. Marram.

Mr. Gould informed the committee his door is always open to them.

SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE

Ms. Doe said the Class of 2007 graduation was beautiful ceremony. She said the class represents the district's best work, and gave credit to the parents for raising good children. She said she is confident they are headed in the right direction in life. She commended the High School administrators, teachers and support staff for their enormous efforts to make the graduation happen. She offered special thanks to the secretaries for the detailed work they do to ensure a successful ceremony.

Ms. Doe stated that last night five seniors graduated from the alternative High School program. A dinner and award ceremony was held to celebrate their accomplishments. She thanked Ms. Megan for her efforts as the director of the program.

Ms. Doe stated that the Dedham Institution for Savings Bank recognized art contest winners Kara Brink, Alexis Brown, and Heather Brink in photography and Rebekah Ton-That, Tori Flagg-Durkin and Kaitlin Tamaro in studio art. Ms. Doe said their artwork is on display at the main

branch of the bank. She said she has spoken with these juniors and each of them is planning to pursue art.

Ms. Doe said the High School test schedule for summer reading is posted on the website.

Ms. Doe reported that the Math Curriculum Committee had recommended the summer math program be enhanced. She brought copies of the math workbooks for grades 4, 5, and 6 to show to the committee. She said the students also receive an informational sheet with the work requirements and a suggested calendar. She said math support is available at the Middle School and the High School during the summer. She said that grades 7, 8, and 9 also have math requirements.

Ms. Doe asked Dr. LaFlamme to comment on the summer reading program. Dr. LaFlamme stated that the test times were changed to 11 AM to 1 PM from 12 to 2 PM. He said that the Middle School program was changed to an all choice program and the assessment piece would be journals. He said he is eager to see the effect these changes have on student reading over summer. Ms. Doe stressed that reading is the pathway to success.

Ms. Doe stated that the Math Committee also made a recommendation to utilize a math reference guide entitled *Math on Call* for grades 4, 5, and 6. She said a notice would go home to parents notifying them of the recommendation and giving them the opportunity to buy the book through the School Department. She said Needham has been using the book for years and it is a good support tool for math learning.

Ms. Doe said they would also be initiating an outreach for a before school, elementary enrichment program. She said the idea is to have parents or community members who use math in their work to come in one day per week to help engage students in math.

Ms. Doe announced that videos of the all night graduation party are available to the graduates. She said this is a new initiative this year and students could obtain a copy of the video through the Park and Recreation Department.

Ms. Doe announced that bus transportation forms are available now and the deadline for receiving these is July 6.

Ms. Connolly asked Dr. LaFlamme what the ramifications were for students that did not complete their summer reading. Dr. LaFlamme responded that the honors level would be moved to level one. He said summer reading is a separate grade on the report card. He said the students are also required to write an essay based on the summer reading in the first term. He said they are encouraging reading in all its forms and parent involvement. He said book discussions with parents can count towards the requirements. Mr. Winrow added that students that do not receive a passing grade in summer reading do not make honor roll first term.

CHAIR'S UPDATE

Ms. Driscoll said that she saw Rich Henderson, the former High School representative to the School Committee. She said he is working for the schools this summer as a tech support aide. Ms. Doe noted that he just completed his first year at Brown University.

Ms. Driscoll read a statement regarding a potential change in the manner in which the Jefferson development will be populated. She said that prior to the commencement of the development the Town was informed the development would comprise 25% affordable housing and twenty

students were anticipated to enroll in the Dedham Public Schools as residents of this development. She said the apartments are now 40% occupied and the Dedham Public Schools already has 20 students. She said the School Committee is worried about an unplanned increase in the student population and a resulting need to redistrict. She noted that the budget gap has already necessitated a reduction in force and this potential increase in students would compel the committee to revisit its priorities. She stated that the committee seeks the proactive support of the Selectmen to address this potential influx of students.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

Rachel McGregor, Riverdale parent, addressed the committee on behalf of several Riverdale parents. She said they are concerned about the grade 1 class size. She said parents have heard there are between 46 to 51 students. She said they have passed along their concerns to the administration and know the administration is monitoring the situation. She said they have been informed that the possibility of a third teacher rests on funding. She said that Dedham has historically supported small class sizes, which enhances the quality of education, and she hoped the district would be able to continue to support small class sizes. She said parents did not feel the district could justify having four to seven more children per class than the other schools.

Ms. Driscoll said the School Department will not know the state aid numbers until July, and they would not be able to say anything definitively until then. She said that if they cannot fund another teacher, they will provide the parents with the options available to them.

Ms. Flatley said the committee and administration are concerned, but that this is not in an unusual situation. She said the district received additional state aid last year and were able to add a teacher. She said these issues do not always have a bad ending.

Mr. Ryan thanked the parents for expressing their concern. He said they hope to have funding to address this, and that the Riverdale first grade is a priority. He said the parents would not have to wait until August 30 to find out what would be happening.

Ms. Connolly asked Ms. Doe what the district might be considering. Ms. Doe said she has spoken with Ms. McGregor about the situation and they are watching the Riverdale enrollment numbers closely. She said it is a top priority and the School Committee has been kept informed of the fluctuations in the class size. She assured the parents that as educators they do not want 25 students in a classroom without additional support. She said they are seeking to address enrollment in an equitable manner, and share the parents concerns. She said this would be addressed as soon as practicable.

A parent asked how additional funding would be utilized. Ms. Driscoll said they have set their priorities, and reminded parents that the School Department had to address a \$700,000 funding gap for fiscal year 2008. She said that if the Town receives additional funding, they will advocate for it. She said additional funds would be used to restore a High School English teacher, and elementary school teacher and an aide at the elementary level.

Another parent asked how they would be informed if additional funds were received by the Town. Ms. Doe said when the numbers come in from the state the School Department begins advocating for funds. She said last year the Town was supportive of the School Department's requests.

Ms. Driscoll said that the parents would be contacted if they felt it would be important to have the parents' support at a Budget Task Force meeting. Ms. Matthews stressed that the driver is the state's fiscal year, which ends June 30. She said they have to wait for the numbers.

A parent asked for updated numbers for grade one. Ms. Doe stated that the class size was at 23 last week and is at 25 this week. She said they would accommodate parents' requests for a transfer to another school with lower class numbers if it came to that. A parent asked for Oakdale's class size numbers. Ms. Doe said they are 15, 16, 16, and 17. She said there is more flexibility there.

Ms. Flatley left at 8:30.

A parent asked where an elementary teacher would be placed if it could be restored to the budget. Mr. Ryan said that the lower the grade the greater the priority for a small class size.

Another parent asked whether there were other sources for funding. Ms. Driscoll said that the Town sometimes has more money than anticipated based on lower than anticipated necessary expenditures.

Ms. Connolly left the meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON ACTION ITEMS

There was none.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE POLICY MANUAL

Ms. Driscoll said that approval of the manual was the final step in having an on-line manual.

Mr. Ryan moved, seconded by Mr. Healy, and it was

VOTED: to adopt the School Committee policy manual. Ms. Connolly and Ms. Flatley were absent for this vote.

Ms. Driscoll mentioned to Mr. La Francesca that there is a fee for having the MASC maintain the on-line manual.

YMCA AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM LEASE EXTENSION

Mr. La Francesca requested that committee support a lease extension for the YMCA after school program for the 2007-2008 school year.

Mr. Roberts moved, seconded by Mr. Healy, and it was

VOTED: to accept the lease extension. Ms. Flatley and Ms. Connolly were not present for this vote.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

May 30, 2007

Ms. Matthews moved, seconded by Mr. Roberts, and it was

VOTED: to approve the May 30, 2007 minutes. Ms. Flatley and Ms. Connolly were not present for this vote.

DONATIONS

Ms. Doe said last year the School Department received a generous donation for an after school enrichment program in math and science at the Middle School. She said there is a commitment from this anonymous donor for two more years, and the donor has offered to extend the funding to the High School as well. Ms. Doe said she looks forward to expanding the enrichment program to the High School.

ITEMS FOR NEXT AGENDA

Ms. Driscoll stated the next meeting date would be July 25. It would include an update on the Riverdale School issue.

Ms. Driscoll stated they would be moving the meeting to the Selectmen's Chambers. The time was 8:40 PM.