

**SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING—April 16, 2008**  
**Distance Learning Lab, Middle School**

**PRESENT**

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

**ADMINISTRATION**

**June M. Doe, Superintendent**  
**Cynthia Kelly, Asst. Superintendent**  
**Michael La Francesca, Business Manager**  
**Alan Winrow, Principal**  
**Clare Sullivan, Principal**

**Convened: 7:05 PM**

**Adjourned: 9:15 PM**

**COMMITTEE REORGANIZATION**

Ms. Driscoll postponed the committee reorganization.

**SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE**

Ms. Doe thanked the committee for participating in the Mentoring Breakfast held on March 20. She said the purpose of this breakfast was to receive feedback from first and second year teachers about their experiences so far in Dedham. She said that it was well received and they would continue to do these.

Ms. Doe stated that students and parents were informed in late March that PowerGrade was opened to them. She noted that the letters to parents were mailed. She said she is proud of this feature, which follows a year long pilot and comes on the heels of being able to open the grade book to teachers off site. She mentioned that report cards went out for grades 6 to 12 on Monday.

Ms. Doe announced that the spring All Town Chorus did an amazing job last year and she is looking forward to this year's event on May 5 in the High School Auditorium. She said all grade levels will be performing. She also announced the All Town Instrumental Concert scheduled for May 7, also in the Dedham High School Auditorium.

Ms. Doe announced that Thursday, May 22, will be the first ever district-wide art show. The show has been named Art in Bloom and will be hosted at the Dedham Middle School. She said senior citizens have been invited to view the show on Tuesday, May 20. She said the show would feature small groups of choral and band students to accompany the visual presentation.

Ms. Doe stated that Mr. La Francesca and Food Service Director Jeanne Johnson have invited area restaurants to collaborate with the High School to feature nutritious meals for the students and to showcase local restaurants. She said tomorrow a chef from Bugaboo Creek will be preparing a nutritionally balanced meal for the students. She stated this is also a professional development opportunity for the food service staff.

Ms. Doe said that the district has received a letter from the MSBA approving Dedham to proceed with a schematic design for the Avery School. She said they have met several times with the MSBA to discuss this project and she is happy to be moving forward in this process.

Ms. Doe announced that April 30 is Student Government Day and encouraged the committee to participate.

Ms. Doe stated the update to the Master Plan is ongoing. She said architect Don Walter has looked at all of the facilities with Mr. Lynch, as well as met with all of the principals. He is currently putting data together and would be coming in to discuss future goals with the administration.

#### **CHAIR'S UPDATE**

Ms. Driscoll reminded the committee that next week is TV turnoff week. She said there are many fun activities planned for the week and reviewed some of the activities available.

#### **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mr. Celata congratulated DEP for getting the vote out and thanked everyone for their participation. He requested a timeline for the potential debt exclusion vote for the Avery project. Ms. Driscoll said the committee would keep him apprised of the project schedule. He also mentioned his interest in seeing the schools combine efforts with the library.

A mother of several students in the Dedham Public Schools, including three daughters at Oakdale, said she has seen the struggle to meet the demands of increasing class sizes at the school. She said she would like an additional teacher brought into grade four to decrease the class size. She said the class size is around 25 and thinks it should be reduced. She said Oakdale has suffered too much with the budget constraints.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT ON ACTION ITEMS**

There was none.

#### ***Taken out of order.***

#### **COPYRIGHT, NETWORK ACCEPTABLE USE, EMAIL, INTERNET SAFETY AND ELECTRONIC DEVICES POLICIES**

Mr. Roberts stated that the Policy Subcommittee received a presentation from Mr. Langenhorst on a copyright policy and updates that are needed for existing policies related to technology. He said Mr. Langenhorst did a thorough job on the new policy and updates. He reported that the subcommittee voted to approve the new policy and recommended passage of this and the updates.

Ms. Connolly asked if the policies were up to date when they were incorporated into the updated policy manual. Mr. Roberts said they were, but that technology changes required these updates. Mr. Langenhorst said the motivation behind these policies is to model respect for other people's work; the policies clarify what the district can and can not do. He stated that they cover registering, copyright office requirements, and offer general legal protection with new laws that have been put into place. He said that most importantly it is the right thing to do and they will continue to educate staff and students about these policies.

Ms. Connolly said she appreciated having the changes in the policies outlined for the committee.

Mr. Roberts noted that today the committee received Mr. Langenhorst's thirty-three minute presentation and said they did a good job on that. Mr. Healy thanked Mr. Langenhorst for the work and detail as well.

Mr. Ryan moved, seconded by Ms. Connolly, and it was

**VOTED:** to accept the copyright policy.

Mr. Healy moved, seconded by Ms. Connolly, and it was

**VOTED:** to accept the changes to the student network acceptable use policy.

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

**VOTED:** to accept the changes to the staff network acceptable use policy.

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

**VOTED:** to accept the changes to the employee email policy.

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

**VOTED:** to accept the changes to the Internet safety policy.

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

**VOTED:** to accept the changes to the use of electronic devices policy.

Ms. Connolly asked if the contract to the network acceptable use policy was part of the policy. Mr. Langenhorst said the contracts were included with the policies, but should not be. He said they are not part of the policy and that not including them gives him the flexibility to make amendments to them without the vote of the School Committee. Ms. Driscoll stated the committee did not need to vote the exclusion of the contracts.

### **SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN – MIDDLE SCHOOL**

Mr. Ruggere said the process to develop a new improvement plan began in October. He stated that they worked with consultant Dr. Ladd to reformat the way they are done, and it is similar to the format changes they saw in the Oakdale improvement plan. He said that the old plan was reviewed prior to beginning work on the new plan. Data, test scores, and performance were evaluated to identify what they thought should be in the new plan. He stated that the plan is a fluid document and will be amended as needed. He noted that the plan could be viewed on the Dedham Middle School website.

Mr. Ruggere stated that the goal of the Dedham Middle School is to provide each student with the best educational experience. He said the School Improvement Plan must identify the essential elements to serve all of the students and outline the actions necessary to accomplish these goals. He said the input from community is important to help make more successful students.

Mr. Ruggere said the members of the Middle School School Council have worked hard to craft this plan. He gave special thanks to Mr. Boles, Cherylann Sheehan, Denise Connell, Susan Riley, Tricia Girouard, Jane Downey, Polly McLeod, Kelly Schultz and David Roberts.

Mr. Ruggere then reviewed the goals achieved in the 2004-2007 plan. He stated that improvements in student performance and achievement were accomplished in the follow ways:

- Expanded writing across the curriculum through focused staff development on the writing process.
- Used assessment data to differentiate instruction and to challenge all students.
- Incorporated technology in the educational program.
- Incorporated open response and short answer questions into the disciplines.
- Provided differentiated instruction and differentiated assessments in math, emphasizing the use of manipulatives, real life problem solving, application and demonstration.
- Improved MCAS achievement targeting students in borderline band scores
- Adjusted the delivery of mathematics and ELA instruction for students in identified subgroups.
- Used technology to enhance instruction (YPP).
- Applied techniques of differentiated instruction and multiple assessments to the middle school curriculum.

Mr. Ruggere stated that they enhanced the school district's model of communication by:

- Providing training to all staff in Blackboard as an instructional tool.
- Providing teacher training and support for the use of SmartBoards as an instructional tool in middle school courses.
- Expanding the use of technology to improve instruction through the seamless integration of programs such as Inspiration/Kidspiration, Lexia, Kurzweil, MassLearns, and Yearly Progress Pro.
- Providing training to all staff on the updated version of PowerSchool.
- Using Blackboard to enhance communication between the school and home.

Mr. Ruggere outlined the achievement of the implementation of the middle school model for grades 6 to 8.

- Developed the Middle School Transition Plan for grades 6-8.
- Provided staff development in grade 8 for transition back into a middle school team.
- Secured required staffing for grade 8 teams.
- Established an athletic program for middle school students, grades 6-8.
- Communicated the needs of the educational model.
- Transferred new positions from grade 8 at the High School to the new Middle School.

Ms. Sheehan presented the 2007-2010 School Improvement Plan. She stated that MCAS score review led to the decision to focus on ELA, math, science and test taking strategies. She reviewed how the teachers would build on the students' skills in ELA, math, and science.

Ms. Sheehan said targeted improvements in ELA will focus on sentence fluency and paragraph writing. Improvements in math will focus on patterns relations in algebra (i.e. slope and linear equations) and absolute value. She said the concentration in science would be on the integration of all three years of science instruction and MCAS science vocabulary. She said the test taking strategy instruction would focus on understanding the directions for open response questions and using techniques for answering multiple choice questions.

Ms. Sheehan discussed additional goals to support student achievement. The first goal is to increase student literacy, which would be supported by continuing to offer before and after school programs using Plato and GoMyAccess; implementing a middle school vocabulary program;

expanding the home and school partnership for reading for pleasure, creating a whole-school reading contest called “The Battle of the Books”, and instituting Teen Read Week.

She said that another goal is an improved school climate. She stated that this will involve increasing opportunities for students to develop bonds with other students and staff; continuing to integrate the Origins Developmental Designs Program with the Advisory Program to define the culture of the Dedham Middle School experience; initiating a peer tutoring program for after school, implementing an after school enrichment program offered by staff; inviting parents in for administrative coffees to discuss topics of interest; and investigating summer possibilities.

Ms. Sheehan said that another goal to support student achievement is to increase home-school collaboration. She said that among the actions to be taken to accomplish this are to conduct a parent information night with an MCAS theme; continue to provide staff professional development on the use of Blackboard; continue to encourage parents to access PowerSchool and GradeBook; continue to work with the Dedham Middle School Parents Group in order to relay information to parents; and to continue to increase the efficiency of the Team Model for timely communication with parents.

Mr. Ruggere stated the goals set forth by the 2007-2010 School Improvement Plan will be monitored by the School Council and Dedham Middle School administration. He said that by working together and assessing the needs of Dedham Middle School students they would continue to provide them with a meaningful educational experience. He again thanked the council members for their hard work on this plan and reiterated that this document will change as they progress.

Ms. Sheehan thanked Mr. Ruggere and Mr. Boles for doing the lion’s share of the work.

Mr. Healy said he understood the reasons for concentrating on the subgroups that need to make AYP, but asked whether other groups might lose out with the focus on these groups. Mr. Ruggere said they would not lose sight of the big picture. He stated that the spiraling of the curriculum and the reinforcement of concepts were identified as areas that have been missed and they are now receiving proper attention. Mr. Healy asked what work was being done on vocabulary. Mr. Ruggere said vocabulary is covered in all subject areas. Mr. Healy said it was important to point out this plan is a beginning.

Ms. Flatley asked whether anything stood out as actions that were not necessary when looking at the 2004-2007 plan and results. Mr. Ruggere said he was not an administrator at the Middle School during that time period, but did not see anything along those lines. Ms. Flatley said there was a new math program put in place during that period that they did not recognize among the accomplishments. Ms. Doe clarified that it was a curriculum change in grade 6. Ms. Kelly said they saw an improvement in the scores following that implementation.

Ms. Flatley asked how the staff would be orientated to the new plan. Mr. Ruggere said a presentation would be given to staff at a faculty meeting. He said the teachers would be working with their department chairs in the specific areas, as well.

Mr. Ryan asked where the writing piece would be taught. Mr. Ruggere said that they would learn about paragraphs and sentence structures in English language arts, but writing skills would be expected in all subject areas. Mr. Ryan asked if there should be more writing in the reading classes. Mr. Ruggere said the students do a lot of writing in these classes; they are expected to model what they are reading.

Mr. Ryan referenced Mr. Ross's concern about the grade 8 science programming. He said Mr. Ross had noted that the eighth graders learn one subject but the test covers three areas. He said he understood the plan is to review the topics each year, but wondered if a more intensive review should be undertaken as the test approaches. Mr. Ruggere answered that spiraling content through all three grades would yield a better result. He added that the learning needs to become more hands on and he would like to see work in the lab to reinforce the curriculum.

Mr. Ryan asked if handouts or outlines are provided to students for the science test. Mr. Ruggere said they are given practice tests. Ms. Kelly said that they purchased Smart MCAS which allows MCAS practice through the district's website. She said it has all prior MCAS tests and the teachers use these in their instruction. She noted that they are complete tests for all subjects and the answers are there for teachers and students.

Mr. Ryan commented on the community concern about grade 8 math MCAS. He said improving these scores is the most important component of this plan. He acknowledged that the 10<sup>th</sup> grade math scores are excellent and suggested that part of the grade 8 problem may be that the test is particularly difficult.

Mr. Ryan asked why the two specific math concepts were identified as the focus. Mr. Ruggere said the data led them to these two weaknesses. He said they are foundational skills and are spiraled through the grades. He said they are presented in a progressively sophisticated manner as they move through the grades. He also reviewed the programs where students would receive remedial support.

Mr. Ryan commented that the participants have been very happy with the athletic program. He said he would like to see it expanded. Ms. Doe pointed out that there currently is no budget for this program. Mr. Ryan suggested limiting participation to grade 8 if it can not be expanded. Ms. Doe said that she has spoken with Mr. Arria and there will be a boys team and a girls team for both grades next year. Mr. Ryan asked about baseball. Ms. Matthews said Mr. Arria said the department hoped to offer a non cut sport each season. Ms. Sheehan said there are other sports organizations for students to participate in.

Ms. Connolly asked what type of evaluation would be taking place to ensure Plato and GoMyAccess are valid tools for moving the district forward. Mr. Boles said these tools are used to differentiate instruction in the classroom and teachers use them to help their students address current weaknesses. Ms. Connolly said the district has had YPP for several years but they still have MCAS issues. Ms. Kelly stated that YPP and MCAS strategies were implemented in grade 6 increasing time on learning. She said the amount of time spent on math in grades 7 and 8 did not increase. She said the improvement in the grade 6 scores showed that it did impact the results.

Ms. Connolly asked if cohorts were looked at as well. Ms. Kelly replied that the Middle School results seem to be lower than both the elementary level and the High School. She said it could be a matter of the students' perspective that the test does not count. She stated that more time should equal better results. She added that they would look at grade 7 to see if the grade 6 improvement carried forward. Mr. Ryan said the extra time on math has been in place for two years.

Ms. Flatley asked about the budget for these programs. Mr. Boles said that the majority was paid for by grants last year and he hopes to receive similar grant funding this year.

Ms. Flatley asked when the students receive instruction in GoMyAccess. Mr. Boles replied that this program is used in reading and ELA. She asked about Plato and YPP. Mr. Boles replied that the students use Plato in math class. YPP is utilized by students before and after school. He said 244 students have used Plato daily in school, some in math and some in support classes. Ms. Flatley asked if they can track teacher use. Mr. Boles said this information has been provided by the consultant along with detailed student data. He is meeting with Mr. Camare on Wednesday to go over the data.

Ms. Connolly asked if the science goals would be adjusted to meet the most problematic concept as the targeted concepts are mastered. Ms. Doe answered that the power standards are the focus, which has been a major shift in the curriculum.

Ms. Connolly asked about the goal to revise the ELA curriculum guides. Mr. Ruggere said the guides are always being revised. He said they identify weaknesses and adapt. Ms. Kelly added that Dr. Laflamme has been working with the staff on six trait writing and this is being incorporated into the guide. She said the teachers have been working with the updated writing concepts.

Ms. Connolly asked about sentence fluency. Ms. Kelly said that is part of the six traits. Ms. Connolly asked if that goes below the middle school level. Ms. Kelly answered that the elementary level worked with Lucy Calkins to build the foundation for the six traits.

Ms. Connolly asked if there were persons responsible identified for each goal. Mr. Ruggere said they were identified, but it might not have been clear on the document they received.

Ms. Connolly asked about situations where special education students would be pulled out of class. Mr. Ruggere said that would not be done on a regular basis, but if parents feel their children need additional time on a subject they would offer additional support. He said that they might take a student out of their foreign language class and prorate the grade. Ms. Kelly said the report card was modified to allow for this accommodation. Ms. Matthews asked why foreign language was selected as a class that could be missed. Mr. Ruggere said that there are other possibilities. Ms. Doe said it is decided based on the student's individual needs.

Ms. Connolly asked for an explanation of what Teen Read Week and Battle of the Books would entail, as well as 2026. Mr. Ruggere stated that Anne Dunne developed the reading incentive programs. He said the 2026 is a science item, but he would have to get back to her regarding the details.

Ms. Matthews asked for clarification on spiraling. Mr. Ruggere said spiraling is repetition of the concepts in the grades in increasing complexity. He said it is done in all subjects, but particularly in math and science. She asked if this is a change in the science curriculum. Mr. Ruggere answered that it is. She asked if this was true of math. He answered that it essentially was.

Ms. Matthews said this is a different plan from what she saw last year. She thought the level of detail is good. She asked if the format left something out of the school improvement plan spectrum, however. Mr. Ruggere replied that the consultant, Dr. Ladd, has done a lot of research on school improvement plans and the template they were provided has proven to be the most effective for creating change and making lasting improvements.

Ms. Sheehan said that she had questions about the model as well, but is pleased with final product. Ms. Matthews said she likes to see measurable goals. Ms. Doe stated they are designed

to be targeted improvement goals. Ms. Flatley stated that as a process, it can be a little uncomfortable, but she came to realize that it is one of the few measures they have and it is well designed for this type of plan. Ms. Sheehan said it is a comprehensive a document to improve overall achievement; it is not solely MCAS driven.

Ms. Matthews asked what the percentages for advancing students into the proficient and advanced categories were based on. Mr. Ruggere said those are projections supported by the data they had.

Ms. Driscoll asked if the Distance Learning Lab is used for its designed purpose. Ms. Kelly said social studies teachers run courses in the lab from time to time and the library uses it as class space. She said that the monitors have not been fully functional and that Mr. Langenhorst has been on top of the issue to get this final piece in place.

Ms. Driscoll said her child asked if they could move parent teacher conferences to later in the year. Ms. Doe said the conferences are held around the first marking period and traditionally parents like to see how their children are faring at this point. Ms. Driscoll asked about the possibility of having a second one. She was informed the contract does not allow for a second night conference.

Ms. Driscoll stated that the incoming sixth grade has been taking MCAS for several years and felt that at a certain point the students would already be familiar with test taking strategies. She said they may want to consider moving away from that component of the improvement plan. Mr. Ruggere said there are current needs that would be supported by the test taking strategies focus at this time.

Parent Susan Richberg asked when students are taking the YPP and Plato assessments. Mr. Ruggere said they are taken during math class. He said some students are getting extra math and they are also built into regular classroom instruction. She asked if the students are missing out on instruction. He said they are not. She said she appreciates what they are trying to accomplish.

Ms. Walko stated her concern about grade 8 MCAS. She thought that changes were necessary to improve instruction and mentioned it did not seem the students received enough homework. Mr. Ruggere said they are consistently assigning homework. He noted that their assignments can be more complex so they are longer term as compared to 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade. He said there are changes in place for improving learning and preparing the students for grade 9, but he would look at this to make sure they are addressing the needs. Ms. Driscoll added that the science curriculum is being changed as well. Ms. Flatley pointed out that grade 8 has a new math text and they are looking at a new text for grade 7 for next year. Mr. Ruggere said the teachers have appreciated having the new text.

Ms. Driscoll said members have suggested word changes in the document, but they could vote the plan and forward the language changes.

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

**VOTED:** to accept the School Improvement Plan for 2007-2010 for Dedham Middle School.

Ms. Driscoll said they would like to look at the private school enrollment trend. Mr. Ruggere said he is working on that data with Ms. McCormick.

### **ACADEMY TEAM**

Superintendent Doe said they have 34 students signed up for the Academy Team. She said there has been an enthusiastic response from parents. There have been two meetings with students and, currently, they are completing surveys on their personal and academic goals. Ms. Doe said she expects two cohorts for the 34 students. She said she has met several parents to discuss the program. She stated the students are taking it in stride.

Mr. Healy asked Ms. Doe to ask the principals to talk to their PTOs about this program to get the word out and get parents excited about it.

Ms. Connolly said parents have approached her with concerns about class sizes for the non-Academy students. Ms. Doe said they are in the process of scheduling and are cognizant of class sizes. She said they are not going to take away from the other students to support the Academy Team. She said maintaining appropriate class sizes is a consistent practice in the district. Ms. Matthews said that was a concern she had heard as well.

Ms. Doe stated that the Academy Team program is a pilot. She said it would give them an opportunity to look at all grade 9 scheduling going forward and to give further consideration to the team model concept at this level.

Ms. Connolly asked if this program would continue beyond this year. Ms. Doe said the nature of High School does not keep students in lock step with each other. She said the natural direction of High School is to give students the opportunity to maximize their potential.

Ms. Flatley asked if these students would have fewer electives. Ms. Doe said they would not. She asked if they could take more than one language. Ms. Doe said it would be possible to take extra science, but another language would be difficult. She said the reason is most students are doing upper level courses and trying to get those in.

Ms. Richberg asked what the grade 8 enrollment is. Ms. Doe answered it is approximately 220. Ms. Richberg asked if she would be hiring additional staff. Ms. Doe said they would be hiring additional staff for the High School, but not specifically for the academy. Ms. Richberg asked if teachers in the academy will get time in their schedules to meet on team matters. Ms. Doe answered yes.

### **MINUTES**

It was noted that the minutes list the wrong date, which should be corrected.

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

**VOTED:** to accept the April 9, 2008 minutes, as amended.

### **DONATIONS**

There were none.

### **OLD/NEW BUSINESS**

Mr. Roberts asked the committee to consider moving the location of the meetings and proposed the Lower Conference Room in Town Hall. The committee and Ms. Doe supported his idea. Ms. Doe stated this location would allow the committee to more easily view presentations using technology.

### **ITEMS FOR NEXT AGENDA**

Ms. Driscoll said the next meeting would be April 30 and would include the reorganization of the committee, an update on the responsive classroom and peer mediation, and a report on professional development.

Ms. Matthews said she would be out of the country on the 30<sup>th</sup>.

Ms. Doe announced that Saturday, May 19, from 9 AM to 12 PM residents could recycle their electronic equipment at the St. Mary's parking lot to benefit the Dedham High School Marching Band and Fine Arts Programs.

Ms. Driscoll stated the committee needed to meet for a brief executive session under exemption three.

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

**VOTED:** by roll call to go into executive session under exemption three. Mr. Roberts – aye, Mr. Healy – aye, Ms. Connolly – aye, Ms. Flatley – aye, Mr. Ryan – aye, Ms. Matthews – aye, Ms. Driscoll – aye.

The committee would not be returning to open session to adjourn.