

**SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING—April 9, 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**

**Cynthia Kelly, Asst. Superintendent**  
**Christopher Campbell, Asst. Superintendent**  
**Michael La Francesca, Business Manager**  
**Alan Winrow, Principal**  
**Jacob Santamaria, Assistant Principal**  
**John Murray, Assistant Principal**

**Convened: 7:00 PM**

**Adjourned: 9:25 PM**

**SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE**

Ms. Kelly provided the Superintendent's update in Ms. Doe's absence.

Ms. Kelly announced the Middle School play would be May 6 and 8.

She stated that Ms. Doe would be meeting with PTO's and School Councils over the next several weeks.

Ms. Kelly said they have received many positive responses to the Academy Team. Class scheduling will begin shortly. Ms. Kelly invited any parents who had questions about this new initiative to meet with her and the Superintendent.

Ms. Kelly stated that Friday administrators would be meeting with representatives from JCY Networks to review the data from the implementation of *Plato* and *Go My Access*. She said they would be sharing that information with the School Committee.

Ms. Kelly announced that Jillian Moses, Dedham High School senior, was named to the Fox 25 All Girls Basketball Team. She said Jillian was featured during the five o'clock broadcast last Friday.

Ms. Kelly congratulated the Winter Color Guard for its recent New England Scholastic Band Association Winter Color Guard Championship win.

Ms. Kelly announced the winners of the 2008 Dedham Youth Commission Annual Art contest for high school age youth. Paula Rodriquez, Stephanie Lloyd and Kara Brink won first second and third respectively in the sculpture category. Mike Mucciaccio and Kathleen Lawless received honorable mentions. In two dimensional art, Heather Brink, Kara Brink, and James Francis, were first, second and third. Honorable mentions were Rebecca Tonthat and Kayla Matta. In black and white photography, Heather Brink took first, Kara Brink took second, and Vivian Daly took third. In color photography Kara Brink took first, Heather Brink took second and Vivian Daly took third. Ms. Kelly said a special thank you goes to art teachers Jen Kerns and Sal Fazio for all their help and Cheryl Murphy, Dedham High School Class of 1972, former art teacher and current president of the Hyde Park Art Association for judging the art work, and to the Dedham

Cultural Council for providing funding for the contest. She said the awards presentation will be Wednesday evening, May 7, at 7:00 p.m. at the Town Hall.

Ms. Kelly announced that the scheduling process for the 2008-2009 school year is underway. She noted that parents must sign the course selection form.

Ms. Kelly announced that music teacher William Nicholson is working with alumnus Steve Barrett for the Alumni/Staff Chorus that will perform at the spring concert on May 21.

Ms. Kelly announced that Bugaboo Creek is coming to Dedham High School to promote area restaurants as well as balanced eating choices by students. She said Bugaboo Creek chef Tom Walen will prepare and serve one of their premier entrees as a special lunch choice.

Ms. Kelly announced that there would be a breast cancer awareness assembly on April 18, which tops off a two-week fundraiser.

Ms. Kelly announced that tomorrow evening at the Middle School the Strategic Plan Steering Committee would be presenting the newly articulated core values and mission and vision statements, as well as outlining the next steps.

#### **STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE'S UPDATE**

Miss Chen reported that two weeks ago the first Mr. Dedham was selected. She said Max Peters received this honor. She said he composed a song and performed it with his father and friends.

Ms. Chen said the sophomore semi formal was held last Friday.

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

Ms. Driscoll reminded parents that April vacation is turn off your TV week. She said that many fun activities are scheduled for it. She said Ms. Flatley is doing scrap booking for that and there are passes for a trip to the zoo.

Ms. Driscoll reminded the committee that the Day on the Hill is Tuesday, April 29. She also reminded them that Student Government Day is April 30. She said cable has invited the committee to meet with them that day as well.

She stated that parents are pleased about the opening of PowerGrade to them.

Ms. Matthews asked Jackie if she could assist with getting students to volunteer at the Dedham Exchange for community service hours.

#### **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT**

Guidance counselor, Cindy McGrann said they have a community bulletin board at the High School on which they could post the Dedham Exchange's solicitation for volunteers.

Mr. Santamaria stated his PowerSchool password does not work. Ms. Connolly said hers does not either.

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

There was none.

## ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT

Mr. Arria introduced Ms. Erika Eisenhut, a math teacher at the High School, as the new varsity softball coach. He stated that Ms. Eisenhut was the JV girls soccer coach in the fall. He also introduced Mr. Keith Comeau, the new varsity football coach. He said Mr. Comeau teaches history at Salem, has assistant coaching experience, and has played semi pro. He added that they are putting together his supporting staff at this time.

Mr. Arria referred the committee to the All Star list he provided in their packets. He noted that soccer players Nicole Savi and Erin McGaffigan were named Eastern Massachusetts All Stars and that Jillian Moses was named to the All Fox 25 Girls Basketball Team. He also noted that senior Lauren Daley was awarded scholarship from Direct Federal Credit Union as part of the Young Women Leaders of Tomorrow Program.

Mr. Arria presented an update of the 2007-2008 fall and winter seasons. He provided highlights of the team results for field hockey, volleyball, swimming and diving, girls soccer, boys and girls indoor track and field, winter cheerleading, girls varsity basketball, and wrestling. Mr. Arria stated that all of the High School's varsity teams earned MIAA academic excellence awards.

Mr. Arria reported on the activities of the athletic department. He said that the short term goals are working to boost athletic participation and restoring Dedham pride. He said New Balance has donated 600 T-shirts to the department. He is going to have them screened to say Marauder Pride and give them to all of the student athletes. He said they will be opening a school store with apparel. He and Mr. Winrow have met with 8<sup>th</sup> graders to talk about sports at the High School. He said they would be making a second visit to the Middle School and would like to invite High School athletes to participate. He said he would also be introducing himself at the elementary schools in an effort to get the students excited about participating in sports or any extracurricular activity.

Mr. Arria said that escalating costs are impacting the budget. He said transportation costs have exceeded \$48,000 already. He said they need to bear in mind that the uniforms need updating and they have equipment needs as well. He also said that as participation and enrollment increase they may need to consider the need for more waivers and the impact this would have on the department's budget.

Mr. Arria spoke about the Middle School athletics. He said these programs are running well and the students are excited about being part of the teams. He said they are financially constrained without a traditional operational budget. He said he is looking to add 7<sup>th</sup> grade teams to the winter season and may add lacrosse and volleyball as sports. He reported that 87 students showed up for track and field today. He said the students will be practicing at the High School and High School students would be helping out, which is needed with the level of participation.

Mr. Arria reviewed plans for the future of the department. He said they are working on fundraising ideas for the entire program, contacting businesses for corporate sponsorships and examining concerns with respect to competing in the Bay State Conference.

Ms. Flatley said she loved the idea of visiting the Middle and elementary schools. She hoped he would have a video presentation for the Middle School. She then asked how long the swim team could be run with its low numbers. Mr. Arria said the team is very competitive, but could not run with much lower numbers. He said Coach Megan has been soliciting interest.

Ms. Flatley worried about having to cut students. Mr. Arria said they are looking to offer a non-cut sport every season. Mr. Ryan thought that if enough sports were offered in a given season that they would not be facing too many cuts. Mr. Arria also commented on the need for grade 8 and 7 teams so that there would not be a grade 8 cut that might discourage participation at the high school level.

Mr. Roberts wanted to know what type of analysis has been done on whether to continue Dedham's participation in the Bay State league. Mr. Arria said he has spoken with staff about it and looked at the numbers in every league. He said the Herget League is not high in numbers, but the Carey League has significant numbers. He said there are many leagues that have great differentials and many that do not. He said the girls do well in Bay State League and as a result other leagues might not want to take them. He said his experience with the Bay State League is it is a great conference and there is a real respect among the schools. He did not feel at this time that it would be prudent to leave the league. He said they do need to improve the competitiveness of the boys teams.

Jackie Chen said she made 2<sup>nd</sup> team on volleyball, but Mr. Arria did include the 2<sup>nd</sup> team on the All Star list. He apologized for the omission.

Ms. Connolly asked which teams were gold and which were silver relative to the MIAA academic awards. Mr. Arria said the fall gold teams were field hockey, girls soccer, boys cross country, girls cross country, girls swimming, girls volley ball, boys soccer, and golf. He said the silver teams were football and cheerleading. He said in the winter the gold teams were girls basketball, girls hockey, girls track and field, and boys track and field. He said the silver teams were boys hockey, cheerleading, wrestling, and boys basketball.

Ms. Matthews suggested he issue a press release about these accomplishments. Mr. Arria said it was in the *Dedham Times* and in Mr. Winrow's *News Corner*. Mr. Winrow said he could do a separate release on this. He thanked Mr. Arria for his support in emphasizing the academic piece.

Ms. Matthews asked where the revenue from the school store would be directed. Mr. Arria answered that he would like it to go to the general athletic budget.

Ms. Matthews said she understood that the High School track is not regulation. She thought they could move the meets to the Northeastern track. Mr. Arria said the Middle School ran track meets there last year. He said that it is difficult to gain access to that track. Mr. Roberts said a codicil on the Northeastern track was that there would be strict limitations on the number of activities on it. Mr. Arria said they moved the Middle School up to the High School for logistical reasons.

Mr. Ryan said he observed that the High School coaches have spoken to Middle School athletes. He appreciated the effort. He added that encouraging the coaches to engage with the sports programs at the Middle School might further the goal of participation.

Ms. Driscoll asked if there is there room on the High School teams to support high participation rates. Mr. Arria reviewed the non cut sports, which are available in each season.

Ms. Driscoll asked if they were considering 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade field hockey teams. Mr. Arria said the problem may be there are not enough 7<sup>th</sup> grade teams in other communities to offer competition. She wondered if there could be a program to develop the students that are interested

in playing it. Mr. Arria said he has thought about offering youth sports that do not have supporting organizations in form of clinics and competitions.

Ms. Driscoll asked if the Boosters could help with uniforms. Mr. Santamaria said the Boosters help out tremendously. He said over the years they have spent thousands of dollars on them. He said the Boosters typically will fund half the cost of the uniforms for teams that fundraise for the other half. He said the problem is they are all fundraising and the cost is astronomical. Mr. Arria said it would be appropriate for the athletic department to fund the uniforms, rather than the individual teams. Mr. Santamaria said equipment is another issue. The cost is high and protective equipment only lasts so long.

Ms. Driscoll asked if the committee could have Marauder T-shirts to wear in the parade.

A parent suggested creating a committee that worked with the athletic department to fundraise. She thought the funds could be directed to the locker room, which is in need of updates. Mr. Arria supported the concept and said he has experience doing it. He said they are attempting to get the locker room updated.

The committee took a five minute break.

### **GUIDANCE DEPARTMENT**

Mr. Winrow said the High School had a number of academic reporting items to address and wanted to look at them in a group. He said he asked Ms. McCormick to lead this and remarked that she did a great job evaluating these issues. He thanked her for chairing the committee and the guidance staff for chairing the subcommittees. He also thanked the staff, parents and School Committee for assisting.

Ms. McCormick introduced the committee report on academic reporting at Dedham High School. She stated the committee was comprised of volunteers representing parents, students, School Committee members, teachers and the entire guidance department. She said the committee and subcommittees met frequently from January to April and thanked the members for their dedication to this research, particularly counselors Andrea Andrew, Cindy McGrann and Ross Wolfson.

Ms. McCormick presented the steering committee's recommendations. She said they are that Dedham High School retain class rank; replace the present system of cumulative quality points with a weighted grade point average (GPA); all students have both an unweighted and weighted GPA; advanced placement (AP) courses be assigned more weight than honors courses; grade designations in the A range be changed to: A-, 90-92; A, 93-96; A+, 97-100; level 1 and level 2 designations be replaced with College Prep I and College Prep II.

Ms. McCormick said the proposed action for leveling is to create an AP level, maintain the honors level, and to change level 1 and level 2 to college prep I and II. She said the reason for the name change is to highlight that a college education provides increased opportunities. She said the word college instills confidence in learners and fosters better outcomes. It also clearly links the courses to the fact they are preparation for college. Finally, she said the NCAA will not approve courses that are not clearly labeled as college preparatory.

Andrea Andrew reviewed the current letter grade breakdown and how the A range would change. She said the reason it is changing is because the current breakdown separates each letter grade

into three sections except A. She stated that eight out of ten surrounding communities use A+, most state colleges weigh A+ more (4.3), and A+ is used at the Middle School.

Cindy McGrann reviewed class rank. She said the current approach is to weight class rank through quality points. She said quality points are determined by the level of difficulty of each course and the grades earned in them. She said all courses that are leveled are included in the quality point system and the more quality points a student earns, the higher his/her class rank will be.

Ms. McGrann said that the question of whether to rank was researched by the committee and noted that many surrounding high schools choose not to rank. She said instead these schools do a weighted GPA to determine class position, but report this information to colleges by way of a scatter plot, histogram or percentile ranking. She said it was determined that colleges use class rank if it is reported, but also find the data shared by “non ranking” high schools helpful. She stated that more colleges surveyed preferred class rank, however. She said the representative to Stonehill College informed them that colleges determine rank themselves.

Ms. McGrann said they also looked at the reasons for ranking. She said the majority of the committee and faculty surveyed favored keeping class rank to promote healthy competition in a competitive world and also to present information about our students in the most positive light. She said colleges do rank high schools.

Ms. McGrann said they propose keeping class rank and the current reporting method (numeric rank order of students) at this time, determining class rank by a weighted GPA instead of quality points, continuing to monitor the practice and watching for what colleges want from Dedham in regard to presenting student information.

Mr. Ross Wolfson discussed the purpose of a weighted GPA. He said it is to quantify the difficulty of the class and the grades received in it. He said the secondary purposes are to provide an estimate of how colleges may quantify a student’s transcript and to give a system of ranking students among their peers.

Mr. Wolfson explained the current system of the unweighted GPA. He said it is an average of all classes in which a student earns a final grade, pass or fail. The letter grades are converted into a modified 4.0 scale and used to determine eligibility for the honor roll. He said it is not used to determine class rank. He said in the current system of quality points the students accumulate points for each leveled class they pass and points are earned according to the grade in each class. He said the points are used to determine class rank and eligibility for the National Honor Society.

Mr. Wolfson reported that the subcommittee surveyed 57 of the colleges to which the High School students most frequently apply to look for trends in how colleges review and quantify high school transcripts. They also surveyed twelve local high schools for models of weighted GPA’s. He said they calculated a variety of weighted GPA models using the High School’s student data and looked at the effects of these models on student GPAs and ranks relative to their current standings. He said in all models students currently ranked 1, 2, and 3 remained 1, 2 and 3 and no student in the top 14 ever fell out of the top 14.

Mr. Wolfson reported that the most interesting finding from the colleges surveyed is that the large majority do not differentiate between college prep I and II. He said that it was also interesting to note that high schools used a variety of ways to calculate a weighted GPA and differed in the classes that were counted.

Mr. Wolfson said the proposed weighted GPA eliminates quality points. He said all leveled classes would be included. CP I classes would be given even weight, honors and CP II classes would receive a 20% bump relative to CP I, and AP classes would receive half a bump beyond honors. For instance, a grade of B would be a 2.4 in CP II, 3.0 CP I, 3.6 in honors and 3.9 in AP.

Mr. Wolfson said weighting classes by a percentage rewards students for being in higher level classes and earning high grades. He said this method encourages students to participate in coursework at the highest level of the individual's ability. He said students would no longer be rewarded simply for taking an honors or AP class regardless of performance.

Mr. Wolfson explained why they used the 20% standard for bumps. He said a common practice at colleges and area high schools is to add 0.5 points for each honors class and a common level of scholastic achievement they seek is 3.0. He said with a 20% bump an unweighted GPA of 2.5 in honors classes would become a weighted GPA of 3.0.

Mr. Wolfson discussed the unweighted GPA. He said for college reporting transcripts would always include the unweighted GPA. He said if the weighted GPA is higher than the unweighted GPA that would also be included. He said AP courses are weighted 30% above CP I. He said the previous AP committee proposed the increased weight due to the additional effort and rigor associated with these courses. He said they would like students to give full consideration to the demands of AP courses before committing to them, however.

Ms. Driscoll thanked the guidance department for all of their work on this.

Mr. Ryan asked for clarification of the unweighted versus weighted GPA. Ms. Andrew said, as an example, they are moving away from the B- in the level 2 class being equivalent to a D- in AP. Students would be awarded points for doing well. Ms. McCormick said that part of the problem was also that GPA's reported to colleges included unleveled classes, but unleveled classes are not typically a part of colleges' GPA calculations. Mr. Winrow commented that the current system is fair, but has some flaws. He mentioned the QPA for class rank in current use has no use for colleges. He said the weighted GPA will offer more meaningful data to the colleges. Ms. Flatley agreed that it would help significantly.

Mr. Roberts spoke about the various ways colleges look at coursework and GPAs. He said weighted dovetails better with realistic grade point averages. Mr. Wolfson stated that they investigated GPA calculations based on core classes, but there was minimal difference in the unweighted and weighted GPA.

Ms. Matthews thought this was good work and would move Dedham in the right direction. She asked if students taking the AP history class would be prepared for the MCAS test considering the syllabus is not set according to Massachusetts standards. Ms. McCormick said that the AP curriculum would cover the information tested. Ms. Matthews asked about the science test as well. Mr. Winrow said the difference in the science test is that it is subject specific. Students can choose the subject and they only have to pass one of them. He also mentioned that there are no requirements for EEPs in science or social studies MCAS scores over 220. Mr. Murray said the AP standards are the same as the standards for the other levels; it is a matter of depth. He said the AP test is more rigorous than the MCAS and students would not have a problem with it.

Jackie Chen asked why the second part of AP biology is only honors. Ms. McCormick acknowledged the lab portion is weighted at the honors level. Mr. Winrow said it was considered appropriate when they initially leveled, but this would be reexamined.

Ms. Matthews asked when the recommendations would go into effect. Ms. McCormick answered next fall. Ms. Matthews then asked how the hybrid classes' transcripts would be resolved. Ms. McCormick said they are looking at this. She added they considered the merits of going back, but decided it would not make sense to do, nor be practical. She said it is not fair to students to change mid stream when students have chosen their classes for specific reasons, nor is it fair to expect teachers to change their scoring method at this point. Ms. Matthews asked if these grades are numeric based. Ms. Andrew said they are.

Ms. Flatley asked if the students were aware that the GPAs would be changed, adding that the AP US history students were told they would receive a higher weight than honors. The members of the guidance department were unaware of this. Ms. Connolly said that is a problem and she supported going back to award the extra weight to the AP grades.

A parent said this is a huge leap forward and asked if the guidance department will be informing colleges about these changes. Ms. McCormick said they would. The parent asked if both the weighted and unweighted GPAs would be on the transcript. Mr. Wolfson said part of the idea is to send whatever looks best. They will send the unweighted GPA and the weighted GPA, if the weighted one is higher. The parent also said it should be retroactive.

Ms. Matthews asked again about the hybrids. Ms. McCormick said typically high schools implement the new system only for the incoming freshmen class. That way they do not encounter hybrid situation. Ms. Flatley said it is a disservice to not change it sooner. Ms. Matthews said she thought the whole High School is doing it. Ms. Andrew said they are; most high schools do not do it that way.

Ms. Connolly said she asked Mr. Dewar looked at the feasibility of weighting the GPAs back to September. She said he thought it would not be an issue to bump the AP students retroactively. Ms. Andrew responded that it would not be fair to students that might have tried harder with this incentive. Mr. Wolfson added that teachers are not prepared to address the distinction between A and A+ at this time. Further, PowerGrade does not readily allow for objectively reporting the A range change.

Ms. Matthews asked if the weighting could be changed to go back to September. Ms. McCormick said that she does not think that everyone got the same message about this, including students. Ms. Matthews said either way one group is advantaged and the other is disadvantaged. Ms. McGrann said that she foresees some students saying that if I had known they would have chosen differently.

The parent reiterated that a specific group of students were told that the AP class would be weighted differently. She was asked by whom. The parent answered that the teachers said this to the students. Ms. McCormick said it is fairer to allow the sum of the issues to bear out the decision. She said many classes did not have knowledge of the weighting issue and there is a greater percentage in this group than the AP students who were told their class would be weighted higher.

Mr. Wolfson answered to Ms. Matthews' comments. He said the weighted GPA is a more meaningful system, but whether it is better for the student is relative to the student. Mr. Murray

said more discussion is needed before any decisions are made. Mr. Winrow added that no student should be taking a course simply because it is weighted higher.

Ms. Driscoll said that the sophomore AP history students worked so much harder than the honors students and those students deserve to know that they respect that. Ms. McGrann said the colleges recognize that and give it weight. Ms. Driscoll responded that the students that took that class deserve those points. Mr. Winrow said the expectations of the AP courses will be clearly defined in the course directory to better inform students for their decision making process. Ms. Driscoll recommended the committee accept the changes but when they happen should be discussed further.

Ms. Flatley asked about the top five students and their AP enrollment. Mr. Winrow said that very few students take four or more AP classes.

Ms. McCormick stated that many high schools do not weigh higher for AP. The value of AP is the additional challenge and the fact it is on their transcript. She said they also can get college credit.

Mr. Roberts said Ms. Kelly can give the Superintendent an update on this and suggested no action be taken until the Superintendent can provide her input. Ms. Driscoll thought they could move forward on a motion to accept the recommendations.

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

**VOTED:** to accept the recommendations of the academic reporting committee with a caveat that the implementation of this is subject to discussion.

Ms. McCormick said that by agreeing to the changes students can consider this when making their plans going forward. Mr. Winrow said this message has been well conveyed to the students this year.

#### **MINUTES**

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

**VOTED:** to accept the March 19, 2008 minutes.

#### **DONATIONS**

Ms. Kelly announced the donations before the committee. West Roxbury Crushed Stone donated sand for the jumping pit at Stone Park at the High School. New Balance donated 600 athletic T-shirts to the athletic department.

Mr. Roberts moved, with grateful appreciation, seconded by Mr. Healy, also with grateful appreciation, and it was

**VOTED:** to accept the donations.

#### **OLD/NEW BUSINESS**

Mr. Roberts said the Policy Subcommittee met this evening with Mr. Langenhorst. It was brought to their attention that the School Committee needs to update its network acceptable use and Internet use policies as well as establish a copyright policy for the schools. He said Mr. Langenhorst has come across technology related copyright matters and wants to ensure the

district is protected. He said the subcommittee voted to accept the proposed amendments and new policy. Ms. Matthews added that laws have changed and the district has not kept up. Also, the increased use of the Internet in education necessitated some of these amendments.

#### **ITEMS FOR NEXT AGENDA**

Ms. Driscoll said the next meeting would be April 16 and would include the Superintendent's evaluation, the Middle School Improvement Plan, data on students leaving the district at grade 6, 7 and 8, and the Honors Academy. She said the committee would also be reorganizing following the election.

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

**VOTED:** to adjourn.