

SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING—October 17, 2007
Distance Learning Lab, Middle School

PRESENT

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

ADMINISTRATION

June M. Doe, Superintendent
Cynthia Kelly, Asst. Superintendent
Christopher Campbell, Asst. Superintendent
Michael La Francesca, Business Manager
Clare Sullivan, Principal
Jacob Santamaria, Asst. Principal

Convened: 6:30 PM

Adjourned: 9:35 PM

The chair stated there was a need for an executive session under exemption three.

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

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

Open session resumed at 7:20 PM.

SUPERINTENDENT’S UPDATE

Ms. Doe reported that High School sophomores and juniors took the PSAT during school hours today. She said that outside students paid to take the test at Dedham High School as well.

Ms. Doe announced that MCAS scores were mailed today from the elementary schools and the Middle School. She said the High School scores would be mailed tomorrow. She noted parent explanation booklets were sent home with students and translated copies were available, if needed.

Ms. Doe stated that the administration has reviewed the MCAS scores. She said TestWiz was used to analyze data. She said it was observed that there was a difference in open response and short answer question scores in the students that were new to the district. She stated that teachers need to differentiate these students for test preparation purposes. She said district has spent a lot of time helping students gain in this particular area.

Ms. Doe said a formal presentation on MCAS is scheduled for the November 7 meeting. She shared some of the principals’ comments on their schools’ scores. She said the High School showed progress in both ELA and math. She said almost all passed the science test with the majority being in the advanced and proficient categories. She said 76% scored in the proficient or advanced category in ELA, 85% in math, 73% in biology and 71% in chemistry. She reported that more than 97% of the students passed the math test and 21% scored in the advanced category in science as compared to the state average of 8%. She said she is encouraged by their progress.

Ms. Doe reported that the Middle School is encouraged by grade 6 progress in ELA. She said they are still looking at the needs improvement category. She reported that 148 out of 218 students in grade 7 scored in the proficient or advanced category in ELA. She stated that the grade 8 math scores are a problem. She said they have made adjustments to the math curriculum

this year and will continue to work on this area. She said the grade 8 ELA scores show 79% in the proficient or advanced category.

Ms. Doe announced that the Middle School is implementing the Plato™ program, which offers targeted improvement in math and ELA for individual students. She stated the school also has a supplemental writing program donated by the Middle School parents group called Go My Access™. She said this program offers students in school and at home access to writing assignments and feedback. She said the district is always looking to improve writing at all levels.

Ms. Doe said the administration is working hard to support individual students. The administrators are taking a detailed look at individual scores to make a better determination of weaknesses and appropriate follow up. She said teachers will be using TestWiz as well, which will be a useful instructional tool.

Ms. Doe reported that grade 6 saw an increase in math scores to 59% in the proficient or advanced category. She said this is due to reinforcement of math skills using technology. She stated the grade 7 math proficient/advanced scores at 47% is not acceptable.

Ms. Doe reported that the Oakdale School had overall improvement in every area. She said she is pleased with the Oakdale staff's efforts to deal with weaknesses and thanked them for their hard work. Ms. Doe said the fifth grade had no failures in ELA or science. She said the school ranked in the top 20% in several areas and grades. She stated grade 4 math scores needs to improve.

Ms. Doe stated the other three elementary schools will provide a detailed picture of their results at the next meeting. She said that overall there was a decrease in scores and reviewed some of the individual school scores. She said they have been working to raise scores on the open response questions and did well. They were pleased with what they saw there. She said the grades 6 and 10 and the Oakdale scores are encouraging. She stated that many initiatives are in place for addressing scores.

Ms. Kelly updated the committee on professional development and mentoring. She said there was a mentor meeting this week and the mentored teachers, who are new to the district, were shown the three different report cards Dedham uses so they could be aware of what the various levels produce. She stated that the new teachers were also informed about the process for professional licensure. Ms. Kelly noted that Ms. Weir is the mentor coordinator this year.

Ms. Kelly said the Plato™ program would be implemented on October 29. She said staff received training for the ELA and math components. She said the writing tool donated by the Middle School parents group will have a November 1 rollout. She added that individual schools have commenced their homework programs and after school MCAS programs would begin in December.

Ms. Kelly said that administrators received professional development as well. She said that the administration was recently updated on changes to IDEA and 504.

Ms. Flatley asked what parents could expect to see with regard to the writing program. Ms. Kelly said students are given writing prompts to respond to and receive specific feedback in real time. She said it looks like a valuable tool for students, and would help the teachers, too. Ms. Doe said essays can be assigned by a teacher and the program would provide some immediate analysis.

Ms. Matthews asked about the MCAS after school programs. Ms. Kelly said there were two programs last year. There was a voluntary enrichment program and a remedial program for those in the warning and failing categories. She said participation in the latter is a requirement for these students, although parents can opt their children out of it.

Ms. Matthews asked if there was anything new about the mentoring program. Ms. Kelly said all first and second year teachers receive mentoring, so the teachers are always changing. She said the mentors change as well according to the needs of the teachers and their subject areas. She said they hold monthly meetings two hours in length. She said teacher conferences and report cards were of the moment, which is why they were addressed at the last meeting. She said the November meeting will address special education. She said a needs assessment was done at the end of last year to guide the mentoring done this year.

Mr. Healy asked if *Math On Call* was popular. Ms. Kelly said that the actual title changed based on grade level, but many books went to out to the elementary schools. Ms. Doe said they would support parents' interest in acquiring the text now.

Ms. Doe said she had a good response for a math enrichment program at the elementary level. She said they have volunteers for grades 3, 4 and 5 at almost all schools. She said Mr. La Francesca may volunteer with this effort. She said a letter is going home to parents to solicit interest for students that would benefit from the program.

Ms. Kelly stated the Math Curriculum Committee will reconvene at the end of the month.

Ms. Kelly said a parent letter went home today encouraging participation in the Core Values Survey for the Strategic Plan. Ms. Doe said it is essential that all members of the community are involved. She the website offers Babel Fish for translation of the document into another language. She said the deadline for completing the survey is November 16, and paper copies are available at the schools' main offices. Ms. Connolly offered to bring copies to the Council on Aging meeting.

CHAIR'S UPDATE

Ms. Driscoll stated that the Dedham Education Foundation dinner is next Thursday at the American Legion. She said that the honorees are Christine Cummings, Pat Dennehy, Gail Kelley, Mike Dewar, Don Gosselin, Don Owens, and Ellen Donovan.

She stated that the Oakdale School would be having a ribbon cutting for the third floor renovation project on November 8 from 6 to 8 PM. She thanked Bill Lane for spearheading this effort and helping to get it done in a very short period of time. She said he estimated the project would have otherwise cost \$380,000.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

Russ Poole asked what the renovation estimate was based on. Ms. Driscoll said Mr. Lane's based his estimate on the labor and donations.

Mr. Poole asked about the Strategic Plan that is currently posted on the website. Ms. Doe said that is the existing plan under which the district is currently working. She said the target date for the new Strategic Plan is June.

Ms. Walko reported that the Endicott Oktoberfest had a good turnout. She said the High School volunteers did wonderful job and they could not have done it without them.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON ACTION ITEMS

There was none.

DISTRICT CURRICULUM ACCOMMODATION PLAN & STUDENT ASSISTANCE TEAMS

Asst. Superintendent Christopher Campbell presented the District Curriculum Accommodation Plan and Student Assistance Team documents, which have been revised and updated. Mr. Campbell said that in February 2001 the state enacted changes to Chapter 71 of the Mass. General Laws adding Section 38Q1/2. It states that “a school district shall adopt and implement a curriculum accommodation plan to assist principals in ensuring that all efforts have been made to meet students’ needs in regular education. The plan shall be designed to assist the regular classroom teacher in analyzing and accommodating diverse learning styles of all children in the regular classroom and in providing appropriate services and support within the regular education program.” He stated that with the passing of this section, the District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP) was adopted by districts and individualized for each of its school buildings. He said the purpose of the plan is to continually strengthen and improve the general education program for the benefit of all students. Mr. Campbell also cited Mass. regulation 28.03(3), which is associated with instructional support and outlines the obligation of school districts to meet the needs of diverse learners in the general education program.

Mr. Campbell stated that DCAP is an educational activity for the general education program. He said it is a systemic plan rather than an individualized student plan, and it assists principals in ensuring that all efforts have been made to meet students’ needs in general education. He said it also helps to prevent unnecessary referrals to special education.

Mr. Campbell outlined some of what DCAP provides, including assistance to the general classroom teachers, support services, and direct and systematic instruction in reading. He said it also encourages teacher mentoring and collaboration and parental involvement in their children’s education.

Mr. Campbell stated the five major components of DCAP are professional development, Student Assistance Teams (SAT), personnel resources providing specific consulting, support or intervention, accommodations and interventions, and supportive program and structure characteristics. He said each school would use the DCAP to identify its own individual supports that fit into the five major sections.

Mr. Campbell discussed the Student Assistance Teams. He stated that many schools have always had something similar to an SAT. He said these are teams of teachers who sit together to determine the needs and suggest instructional supports for a student who has been referred to them by a classroom teacher. He stated that this process would not prevent or delay appropriate referrals to special education.

Mr. Campbell said the result of a team meeting on an issue would be to suggest and document classroom modifications, alternative techniques and possible testing for students not meeting with success. He said in order to fully support the SAT model, the membership would include many types of personnel, including the principal, assistant principal, counselors, school nurse, special education teachers, academic specialists, instructional resource specialists, technology specialists, and the referring classroom teacher. He said it may be appropriate on certain occasions to have the parent and/or student directly involved. He said that the parent is kept informed throughout

process. He said each fall principals must identify a team for their school and forward the list to him.

Mr. Campbell said the SAT process is initiated when a student experiences school difficulties. The team would meet to gather assessment data, identify student strengths and needs, and identify and implement strategies for resolving the difficulty. He said that if the difficulty persists, the team would consider alternative program services or intervention inside or outside of the school. He stated that if the difficulty is still not resolved after these steps have been taken and a disability is suspected, there is a referral for special education evaluation. He reiterated that this process would not prevent or delay appropriate referrals to special education.

Mr. Campbell concluded by stating that DCAP helps to ensure that efforts are being made to meet the diverse needs of students within the regular education environment. He stated that Dedham values the life experience of the students and is committed to making an effort to offer parents many avenues to be involved in the education of their children. He emphasized it is a worthwhile process and that SAT's are used to the best advantage of the student, as well as to keep special education referrals to a minimum.

Ms. Connolly asked if the SAT was around before 2001. Mr. Campbell said there were student assistance teams known as TST's, teachers assisting teachers. He said the referred students were previously known as pre-referrals. He said the whole purpose is to address diverse learners within general education. Ms. Connolly commented that she was surprised she had not known about the SAT's prior to this presentation. Mr. Campbell said the parents are involved with SAT's on an individual basis, but he has had many conversations with parents about their existence. He said that the district tries to encourage this process before going forward with a referral. He said that if the student is referred for evaluation, the referral team will have a significant amount information to begin with. He said that they do get unnecessary referrals nevertheless.

Ms. Connolly asked if Mr. Campbell's example of a student referral to an SAT was typical. Mr. Campbell said it is not usually that basic. He said there might be a student that can not grasp a writing concept and it may require a brainstorm on how to get the student to understand. The team would draft an accommodation to get the student there. Ms. Kelly said she chaired the SAT at the Middle School. She said they always made sure the parent was made aware. She said a team may have had to look at student who failed every test and wanted to brainstorm.

Ms. Connolly asked if a High School parent has to wait for the progress report before knowing that their child needs support. Ms. Kelly answered that opening the grade book on-line and Blackboard would help to alleviate that problem.

Ms. Matthews asked if the outcome of the SAT process is an IEP. Mr. Campbell said it is not. He said the purpose is to accommodate the child in general education. Mr. Campbell reviewed what the SAT would do to accomplish this. He said it might go to referral, but it could also go back to the beginning of the SAT process to address in another manner. He said this process reduces unnecessary referrals. Ms. Matthews asked where the dividing line between the SAT and an IEP is. Mr. Campbell said if the curriculum must be adapted or a speech/language pathologist or physical therapist is needed it may move to referral. Ms. Doe said that is the next step. He said they might use an occupational therapist to help maintain the student in general education, however. He stated that referrals are labor intensive and taxing on the student. He said they want to avoid that and accommodate the learners.

Ms. Matthews asked if this process would not be used if the student has a specific diagnosis. Mr. Campbell said a student on an IEP could still have an issue crop up that could be dealt with through the SAT process.

Ms. Matthews asked who approves the plan. Mr. Campbell said the district develops it and controls it. He said the district does need to demonstrate to the Department of Education that they have the personnel to support all learners. He said they designed the document the School Committee is looking at, and most of it is simply a checklist to ensure the student is appropriately supported.

Ms. Flatley asked if the DOE would be looking at it in the Coordinated Program Review. Mr. Campbell said the DOE would look at it. She asked what happens if a parent asks for a special education referral. Mr. Campbell said they try to address student issues through the SAT's, but would follow a parent's wish if the referral is what they want.

Ms. Flatley asked how classroom teachers know about the SAT. Mr. Campbell said principals have the primary responsibility for establishing these teams. The teams are discussed at an initial meeting and then assembled. Ms. Kelly said Mr. Campbell would inform special education staff and the principals deal would address this in their staff meetings. Mr. Campbell said teachers have always been aware of the DCAP and SAT's, but the process has changed slightly. Ms. Flatley asked if the teachers use it. Mr. Campbell said they do. Ms. Kelly said most schools have a set team meeting to address all issues.

Ms. Connolly asked about the process at the High School. Mr. Santamaria said the SAT is used all the time. He commented that at this level kids do not suddenly develop learning difficulties. The teams are more apt to be looking at social skills, performance issues, and study skills. He said they contact the parent and the parent is part of the first meeting.

Ms. Sullivan said elementary level has the teams in place as well. She said they meet at different times depending on the students' needs. She said teachers use the teams as sounding boards to work out problems, and it is fairly successful.

MINUTES

September 26, 2007

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

VOTED: to approve the September 26, 2007 minutes.

October 3, 2007

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

VOTED: to approve the September 12, 2007 minutes.

DONATIONS

Ms. Doe said she was informed that the Middle School received a \$7,000 writing tool called Go My Access™ from the Middle School Parent Group. She expressed her appreciation of the donation. Mr. Ryan extended his gratitude as well.

RATIFICATION – CAFETERIA WORKERS' CONTRACT

Ms. Flatley reviewed highlights of the cafeteria workers' contract. She said this contract covers employees who work in school kitchens under Food Service Director Jeanne Johnson. She noted

that the food service department is a self funding program. She stated the cafeteria workers would receive a 6% retroactive pay raise for the 2006-2007 school year, 5% for 07-08, and 3% in both 08-09 and 09-10. She said the employee responsibility for the health insurance premium would increase to 15% and all new employees would pay 20% of their premium. She said other language includes longevity for employees working more than 20 hours per week, a sick leave bank, a one year probationary period, an evaluation process, and clarification of job classifications.

Ms. Flatley stated that she and Ms. Matthews are pleased to have this contract. Mr. Ryan asked if Ms. Flatley and Ms. Matthews support the agreement and recommend the committee vote to approve it. Ms. Flatley said they did. Ms. Driscoll stated the contract has been reviewed by the negotiating team and legal counsel.

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

VOTED: to accept and ratify the cafeteria workers' contract retroactive one year, 2006-2007, and the contract for the period beginning September 1, 2007 to August 31, 2010.

Mr. Ryan thanked Ms. Flatley and Ms. Matthews for participating on the negotiating team. He said he appreciated their willingness to assist with this.

Ms. Driscoll reported that the committee remains in mediation with the paraprofessionals. She said this contract is taking a little longer to negotiate due to the broader employee base. Ms. Matthews said there are four meetings set up for November and commented that there is a sense of urgency to complete negotiations.

Ms. Driscoll stated that this is the first contract for cafeteria workers.

REQUEST TO PLACE BASKETBALL NETS – DEDHAM YOUTH BASKETBALL

MS. Driscoll said Dedham Youth Basketball has offered to replace the basketball nets at the elementary schools. She said this does not require a vote of the committee. She thanked Dedham Youth Basketball for the gift.

YMCA EXTENDED DAY PROGRAM LEASE

Mr. La Francesca requested the committee approve an extension to the YMCA's extended day program lease to June 30, 2008. He noted that the only other change to the document was the incorporation of the new custodian rate.

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

VOTED: to accept the lease extension from September 1, 2007 until June 30, 2008.

OLD/NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Flatley reported the Budget Subcommittee met today. She said the subcommittee reviewed the five year capital plan and compared it to the capital requests in the School Improvement Plans to make sure they were addressed. She stated they have been pretty consistent in fulfilling the needs within the general budget. She said the subcommittee also discussed the FY 08 operating budget and continues to monitor the utilities and special education line items. She noted the next meeting would be held on November 7 at 8:45 AM in the administrative offices.

Ms. Connolly added that with the likelihood of significant increases in oil prices, they may be switching to gas at the High School to save money.

Ms. Flatley thanked parents for their participation at the October 4 SEPAC meeting, at which a special education specialist spoke.

Mr. Ryan stated that he is on the Budget Subcommittee this year. He commended Mr. La Francesca for his budget preparation and remarked that Ms. Connolly and Ms. Flatley are doing a thorough job examining the budget line items. He also commented that the School Department has done a good job addressing the improvement plan requests as they go. He said these requests typically address quality of life issues which make the schools more attractive.

Ms. Flatley said she attended the state house discussion on legislative issues relating to education, health, wellness, safety and special education. She said she would follow the bills as they go through the process. She said she spent time with Rep. McMurtry's and Sen. Walsh's staff on the Avery School replacement. Ms. Doe said she appreciated Rep. McMurtry's recent visit to the school to become familiar the project.

Ms. Driscoll stated that Ms. Doe, Ms. Kelly and Principal Sullivan attended the recent East Dedham summit meeting and offered their input on the Avery School and its impact on the community. She said Avery is understood to be an anchor in the East Dedham community and needs to be rebuilt.

ITEMS FOR NEXT AGENDA

Ms. Driscoll said the next meeting date would be November 7 and the agenda would include the MCAS presentation. The meeting will be held in the auditorium.

Ms. Driscoll stated the committee would resume its executive session for a brief period of time and would not be coming out of executive session to adjourn.

Ms. Doe wished the football team continued success. She said they did a great job last Friday night. She said the Milton coach commended the team's performance and their sportsmanship. Mr. Santamaria said the next game would be held at 2 PM on Saturday.