

SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING—March 11, 2009
Dedham Middle School Auditorium

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 Manager

Convened: 7:00 PM

Adjourned: 9:18 PM

SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE

None

CHAIR'S UPDATE

Ms. Flatley presented update on Unit B negotiations and contract was presented for ratification. Motion to Accept Unit B Contract as presented for 2008-2011 made by Ms. Flatley, seconded by Ms. Matthews. Approved

Motion made by Mr. Roberts and seconded by Mr. Healy to open the public hearing on the Athletic League change. Vote taken by roll call: Mr. Healy-yes, Mr. Roberts-yes, Ms. Driscoll-yes, Ms. Mathews-yes, Ms. Connolly-yes, Ms. Flatley-yes, Mr. Ryan-yes.

Public Hearing is now in session. Ms. Driscoll presented a brief update and overview of the process to date. On March 25, 2009 the School Committee will take a vote whether or not to accept the Tri-Valley invitation. The Chair asked Mr. La Francesca to address some of the questions from last week. Reviewed how transportation costs were projected. The Chair reviewed the rules of the public hearing. Anyone wishing to speak has to be recognized by the Chair, state your name and go to one of the microphones to speak. She will follow the sign-in sheets to recognize individuals who expressed an interest in speaking first and then any other audience members. Mr. Don Seager reviewed his list of pros and cons concerning the change. He talked about girls' sports and outstanding facilities in the Bay State League. Survey conducted at the High School overwhelmingly show the athletes do not want to move out of the Bay State League. Parent statement: Thanked the students that wrote an article in the Transcript. On the issue of change – the people he has spoken to are not in fear of change. There are valid reasons that this change will not have a positive impact on Dedham athletics. Whatever happens, this is not an endpoint. Parent statement: Spoke about distance having to travel in the Tri-Valley League and the increased costs of transportation. Families cannot afford to pay additional fees. Time, Distance and Expense will limit opportunities for students. Several female students –read letter printed in the Transcript which spoke of the survey conducted by the Athletic Dept. 72% of student athletes voted to remain in the Bay State League. 23% voted to change to the Tri-Valley League and 5% left the question blank. This was the first time that we, the student athletes were asked what we wanted. Who is it that really wants the change, the adults in the town or the actual students who play the sports? Twenty-one out of the twenty-five coaches voted to stay in the Bay State League, while 4 voted to change. When it comes time to vote, please remember what we, the athletes want.

Student statement: Switching to the Tri-Valley League sends a message that boys' sports are more important than girls' sports. She would consider it a slap in the face. Question asked: Have we gotten a legal opinion. Referred to a document generated in 1999 regarding girls' ice hockey. The fact that the girls hockey would not be in "league" would not be enough to rise to a Title 9 case. However, the fact that there would be not opportunity for a JV girl's ice hockey team might. We do not have a formal opinion, but legal counsel is cautious and is concerned over the JV girls Hockey team. Parent statement: I would like to bring up the subject that was glossed over at last meeting which is the reason for this discussion – enrollment is the core of the issue. Student statement: Spoke of a petition on line – 94 students signed it. Every sports team was represented. Spoke about her experience with girl's track. Spoke of support in remaining in Bay State League.

Staff Statement: The economic outlook is bleak in the town. Increasing the financial burdens of the school department doesn't make sense to her. It's not about enrollment, it is about the kids, and if the kids want to stay and the coaches want to stay that's what it should be about. There is a developing football situation – proposal to eliminate leagues and create a division of 16 teams. Schedules would be determined by population – exclusively. Currently it is sitting with a sub-committee with the MIAA, decision not until 2010.

Wrestling coach Dedham High: Change shouldn't be for one sport, it should be for all of the sports. The enrollment numbers are pathetic. Parent statement: What a cop out. If he thought for a minute a change would make a difference he'd be on the band wagon. Let's start a task force to look at town wide to see what we are doing wrong. Let's build a program from the elementary up. Girls Ice Hockey and Tennis coach: Speaking for the girls' ice hockey team, teams don't want to play Dedham. This would be a real disservice to the girls. In addition, we are just a proud of our JV Hockey team as we are the Varsity.

The Chair opened up the floor for additional comments:

Football and co-captain of wrestling team: It's not about the enrollment numbers it's about how much work you put into it. Student Representative to the School Committee: I run Boys Cross-Country. I run on the worst team at Dedham High history. It's humiliating. But at the end of the day I know I run with the best. He would pick the Bay State League over the Tri-Valley League any day.

Parent Question: Why don't we have a legal opinion on this matter, we've been talking about this for months and are about to make a decision. Shouldn't we have that opinion? Superintendent Doe responded that any parent or player has the right to file a complaint under Title 9. We would not know the outcome of that complaint until after the audit (on the Federal level). The attorney could not predict what the outcome would be. He has raised a concern with the issue of no JV girls' ice hockey team if the move is made. Chairperson Driscoll read two letters she received. Both were in support of remaining in the Bay State League. Parent statement: He stated that we've been very disrespectful to the Tri-Valley League and we're doing a disservice to the Tri-Valley League tonight. All the meetings have been open. Coming in at the last minute puts a lot of pressure on the School Committee. Retired Staff statement: He stated everyone here tonight wants to do what is best for Dedham. Academically, we're on our way to getting back our pride – athletically we have a long way to go – we need to get a committee together and look at all the whole picture. Parent statement: Three children he hopes will play sports at Dedham High one day. Concerned there is a vast difference in coaches in male vs. female. We should look at coaches and their philosophies. The bar should be the same height across the board. Parent statement: When the student athletes vote overwhelmingly to stay where they are and the coaches vote overwhelmingly to stay where they are, then what is the question? It's a non-subject, the kids have spoken, let's end this. Parent statement: Set up a task force, and look at our facilities. Survey all the students and ask them why they don't participate in sports.

Mr. Arria talked about the survey that was conducted. 275 students answered the question if they do not participate in athletics and 29% answered they don't have time and 30% answered they are not interested. 25% said they take part in other activities. Parent statement: Looking at the numbers from the survey there are more students in 9th and 10th grade who are participating in sports. She feels this is directly related to their opportunity to play sports at the middle school level. The middle school program is going to get bigger and better.

The Chair will accept a motion to close public hearing, so moved by Mr. Ryan, seconded by Ms. Connolly and it was voted by roll call: Mr. Roberts-yes, Mr. Healy-yes, Ms. Matthews-yes, Ms. Connolly-yes, Ms. Flatley-yes, and Mr. Ryan-yes. Public Hearing is now closed.

Motion made by Ms. Flatley to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Ryan. Adjourned