

**Dedham Public Schools
School Committee Meeting
December 21, 2022**

MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Dr. Melissa Pearrow
Victor Hebert
Mayanne Briggs
Joshua Donati
Christopher Polito
Cailen McCormick
Tracey White
Tara Duncan

MEMBERS OF THE ADMINISTRATION PRESENT:

Michael J. Welch, Superintendent
Dr. Ian Kelly, Interim Superintendent
Matthew Wells, Assistant Superintendent of Business and Finance
Dr. Sara Stetson, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services

Meeting Location:
Avery Elementary

School Committee Meeting commenced at 7:00 p.m.

Open Meeting

Dr. Melissa Pearrow called the meeting to order.

Pledge of Allegiance

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Phil Gonzalez 36 Blossom St., member of the Board of the Dedham Education Foundation (DEF) read a statement from the DEF. He described the donations and support provided by the Foundation. In reference to the presentation by Dr. Matthew Henry at the high school today, he said that as a member of the DEF he is aware that 1 in 3 students in Dedham are students of color and the DEF supported the presentation by Dr. Henry as part of their diversity/equity speaker series. He said the presentation was vetted by the Chairs of Dedham English and World Language Department and he thinks that the people in Dedham should have been able to extend a gracious welcome to him.

Susan Butler has been active in the Dedham School Committee meeting for 25 years. She noted that Dr. Matthew Henry is known for politically charged poetry. Some of his writings are disturbing. She read excerpts from his poetry and questioned the rationale behind his value.

She feels Dedham should be using enrichment money for promoting academic excellence and the quest of better resources. She does not want the focus on diversity and equity to blind us towards other socio political beliefs.

Julie McLeish, 179 Adams St. asked about the plans to change the 5th grade puberty program. She suggests the schools host an in-person meeting about the curriculum changes so parents are aware about the changes before they are implemented. Public schools should not promote one-sided theories.

Trish Kelliher, 28 Ash. St. has two students at the high school. She thanked the schools for providing Dr. Henry the opportunity to speak with our students. She feels he brought in different points of view to our students. She feels that Dedham High School has provided her children with a premium education.

Rebecca Gates, 35 Goshen Rd. stated that the issue with the presentation by Dr. Henry was about content, not color. She feels that because Dr. Henry is outside our district, that a waiver should be required signed by the parents for this type of presentation. She thinks the presentation was not appropriate for high school aged children and it was divisive. She encourages the School Committee to take a stand against this type of diversity and equity presentation.

Colleen Hines, 37 Quincy Ave has two students in the DPS said she felt that the writings of Dr. Henry were discriminatory and created a divisive community. She said in the past, she has asked that the DEI officer be present at equity updates for the School Meeting and she has not seen the officer present. She thinks the experts who are responsible for events and seminars should be presenting their ideas and the choices they are making on a regular basis. She asked the School Committee members to stand up to represent our children.

Emily Walton, 33 Eleanor St., thought Dr. Henry provided an enrichment opportunity for students. She thinks it was an opportunity to view community through literature and she feels the presentation extended diversity learning outside the regular classroom.

Superintendent Update– Supt. Michael J. Welch

Wednesday, December 21, 2022

Today was the 71st day of school for the 2022-23 school year. Happy Winter Solstice! At 4:48 PM today, the sun was at its lowest point in the horizon and today was the shortest amount of daylight we will experience this year. It's all looking brighter and sunnier for longer from here on... There are 109 days of school left this year. Remember that this Friday (December 23) there is **NO SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS** as we start our December vacation.

I am very pleased to announce that on December 12 I received an [email from MA DESE Center for Strategic Initiatives \(CSI\)](#) indicating the Dedham Public Schools had received a \$91,000 FY23 Teacher Diversification Pilot Program grant. We received a [congratulatory note from Governor Baker and Lt. Governor Polito](#) also. Dedham's DEI Officer Dr. Oneida Fox Roye wrote this grant for the district, and these resources will be used to build a pipeline to encourage DPS paraprofessionals to obtain their official MA teaching license. These competitive grants are for eligible school districts and more can be learned about these efforts at the [DESE Center for Strategic Initiatives website](#).

Today I received [a letter from the MSBA](#) indicating that the Greenlodge and Riverdale schools will NOT be accepted as individual schools into the MSBA's "core program". This simply means that these two schools will not be considered as "stand alone" projects for MSBA funding at this time. This is not unexpected, and completing these applications was a very labor intensive process that was recommended by the agency. This development has no impact on future possible consolidation considerations in regard to the ongoing Oakdale MSBA project. For more information regarding the MSBA core program statement of interest process, you can click on [this link](#).

Also this week Dedham received confirmation of our participation in the nationwide class action lawsuit against JUUL Laboratories in regard to their sales practices and product liability for their vaping products. This was an exhaustive exercise so that we (Dedham Public Schools) could be a party to any eventual settlement on the impact of these products on our students. While I do not believe this will be a quick resolution, I will provide additional information as the case moves forward. [Dedham's "Plaintiff Fact Sheet" is available here](#).

Over the past two weeks I have spent considerable time working with Central Office team members to coordinate a seamless transition to the tenure of Dr. Ian Kelly as Interim Superintendent. I am very confident that Dr. Kelly has a solid grasp of the added new responsibilities necessary, and I intend to be available and in constant communication with him as needed for the next six months.

I have also done my best over the past two weeks to visit each school and personally thank all faculty and staff for their work with our students. Every member of the faculty and staff has contributed to our success, and I am grateful to have had their confidence in my leadership. I wanted to personally thank as many of them as possible, and I felt it was an important gesture of thanks.

Since this is my final School Committee meeting as Superintendent, I want to take this opportunity to publicly thank all present and prior members of the Dedham School Committee for the opportunity to serve the Town in this capacity. I remain tremendously indebted to the community for taking a chance on me 9 years ago as a person with lofty goals and zero Central Office experience. I have tried my best to work hard and always do what is best for all students

in our community. I consider these past 9 years to be the professional opportunity of a lifetime, and I will drop everything in the future if the Committee or community should ever need my assistance. Please do not hesitate to reach out. Thank you.

And...no final Superintendent's Update would be complete without some wastewater data and graphs...

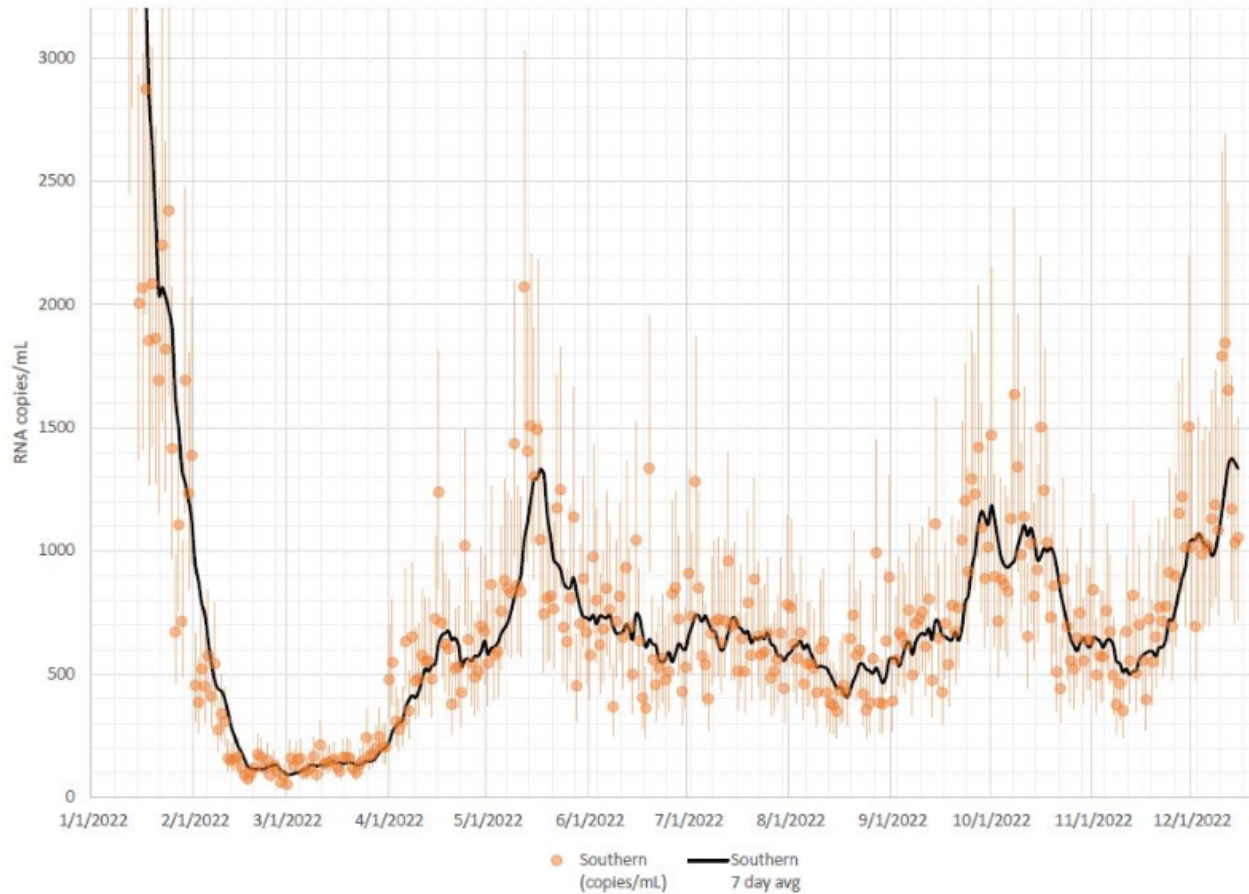
COVID-19 Update

Information gathered over the summer as [COVID-19 data for Dedham](#) shows another up and down trend over the past few weeks, but the average daily incident rate has stayed in single digits during this time.

The [CDC has rated Norfolk County in the "MEDIUM" community level category by their designation criteria](#). This is unchanged since my last report.

The MWRA COVID-19 concentrations in wastewater over the past few weeks have continued a fairly steep increase and are at their highest rates since February 2022. Please take a look at the MWRA graph below to be aware of the most current trends in Dedham and surrounding areas. This information is updated every Thursday with the previous week's data. More comprehensive information may be obtained from the [MWRA COVID-19 wastewater surveillance website](#).

Recent South System Viral RNA Signal by Date



Supt. Welch responded to the comments about Dr. Henry’s presentation. He said that 22 students attended the presentation with parental permission. He heard feedback that the students identified with the poetry and Dr. Henry’s experiences and he thinks it instilled a sense of belonging among the students attending. The students were an integral part of the experience and were able to share their feelings about the subject.

Interim Superintendent Update– Dr. Ian Kelly

Dr. Kelly announced that he would be presenting an Interim Report about transition planning. He said that the contract for Dr. Heather Smith, who was appointed the Interim Assistant Superintendent will be ready for signing at the next School Committee meeting. The decision has been made to not fill her position while she fills the Interim Assistant Superintendent role. Dr. Kelly announced that a celebration was held last week for Supt. Michael Welch. He presented a certificate to Mr. Welch signed by the School Committee.

Mr. Poilito asked if the School Committee would be required to confirm the appointment of Dr. Smith. Dr. Pearrow said the School Committee would be approving the contract at the next School Committee meeting.

Reports/Updates/Requests

Town Sustainability Goals – Solar Update

Denise Moroney, Director of Facilities for the Town of Dedham and Dedham Public Schools, presented an update on solar energy.

- Mass. Clean Energy plan was put into effect in August 2022.
- The Dedham Sustainability Advisory Committee put together their climate plan in June 2020.
- The Mass. Clean Energy plan requires a phased in net zero energy plan with goals to achieve Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.
- The phased in plan requires that 35% of energy be supplied by renewables by 2025 and 50% energy be supplied by renewables by 2030. The law is based on the 1990 emissions baseline.
- Ms. Moroney reported that she is working with the Select Energy consultants to evaluate savings in electricity by first starting with the installation of solar carports in parking lots. The School Committee needs to make the decision about the focus of the plan. Select will work with the School Committee to determine locations.
- The contract with Select Energy will be for a 20-year period and needs to be approved in Warrant Article at Town Meeting.

COMMENTS from School Committee members:

Dr. Kelly said Denise has provided him a comprehensive update about the requirements of the new law. He said the suggested timeline is not locked in but the success of the plan will be determined by the timeline.

Ms. White asked why the Capen School was not on the original list and whether it could be added on? Ms. Moroney said there are ongoing discussions about the Town buildings that will be included in the plan.

Mr. Donati thinks we should also consider solar panels on rooftops as well as carports.

Ms. Briggs asked about the timeline. Ms. Moroney said that once all the options have been evaluated, she will present a timeline. The Town's cost will need to be assessed separately from the schools' costs. The Letter of Intent needs to be signed by February 2023.

Mr. Kelly said the Letter of Intent does not obligate us, but Select Energy needs to start on the process for analysis. Dr. Pearrow said the Letter of Intent will be discussed at the next meeting.

Subcommittee Updates

- Superintendent Search

Ms. Briggs said the Screening Subcommittee reviewed applications during the December 17th meeting.

Five final candidates were chosen by the Screening Subcommittee. Public interviews by the School Committee members will be held on the following days from 6:30 to 8 pm:

- o January 5th - Dr. Renee McCall
- o January 9th - Ms. Nan Murphy
- o January 10th - Dr. June Saba-Maguire
- o January 11th - Dr. Marlene DiLeo
- o January 12th - Dr. Armand Pires

Dr. Pearrow thanked the Screening Subcommittee for putting in so much work on this project. Public feedback can be submitted via online forms until January 16th. Dedham TV will be filming all the interviews live and on demand.

- Budget

Mr. Polito said the Budget Subcommittee met Monday and will meet again next week. The budget hearing date for the 2024 budget is scheduled for February 14th.

- Communications

No update.

- Curriculum Advisory

Dr. Kelly announced that when Dr. Smith's contract as Interim Assistant Superintendent is approved, she will take on the responsibility of the Curriculum Advisory Committee duties.

- Policy

Mr. Donati said he received an update from Kevin Bresnahan on the Flag policy and that will be further explored in February.

- SBRC

Mr. Herbert said there was a meeting this week about viable sites facilitated by the designers. The next meeting is January 19th at Town Hall.

- Traffic Circulation

No update.

- Negotiations

Ms. White said their next meeting is January 3rd.

- Parks & Recreation

Mr. Polito said they are reviewing the MOU. They will be setting up a meeting with Parks and Rec in late January.

Donations

\$1K was received from Dedham Jr. Women's Club for the Middle School trip to Washington DC.

Motion was made to accept the \$1K donation from the Dedham Junior. Women's Club.

Motion was approved by a vote of 7-0.

Review and Approval Vote of Previous Meeting Minutes

No meeting notes were available for approval.

Old/New Business

[NONE.]

Acknowledgements and Announcements

Ms. White thanked Supt. Welch for the dedication he gave to the superintendent position.

Dr. Pearrow thanked Supt. Welch for setting a strong role model for the next Superintendent.

Motion was made to adjourn and approved by a vote of 7-0.

Submitted by

Virginia Quinn

Recording Secretary