

**Dedham Public Schools
School Committee Meeting
March 15, 2023**

MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE PRESENT:

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

MEMBERS OF THE ADMINISTRATION PRESENT:

Dr. Ian Kelly, Interim Superintendent
Matthew Wells, Assistant Superintendent of Business and Finance (absent)
Dr. Sara Stetson, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services
Dr. Heather Smith, Interim Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum

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

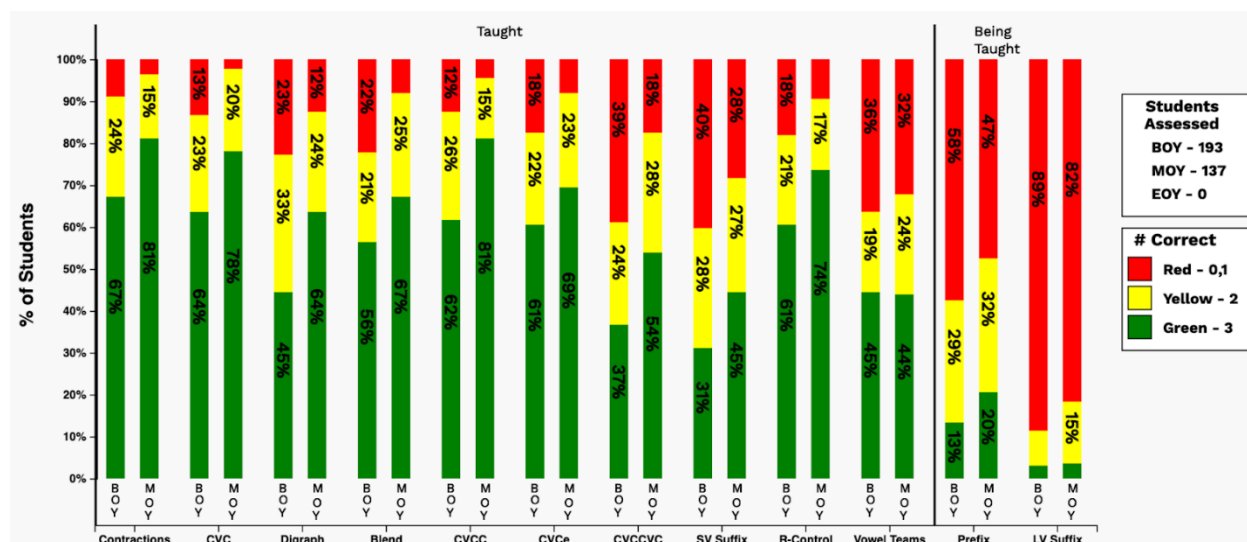
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**Dedham Public Schools
Interim Superintendent's Update**

Teaching and Learning

[STAR Phonics](#). Given the disruptions to learning that Grade 3 students experienced during COVID, the District has implemented specific word study instruction to ensure that all students continue developing critical literacy skills and concepts. As a result of this supplemental support, Dedham's students continue to learn and make strong progress. The chart below provides a summary of data for grade three students across the data. Assessments are grouped by skills along the horizontal (x) axis. Within each skill student results are grouped by beginning

of year assessments results (BOY) and middle of year assessment results (MOY). For beginning and middle of year assessments of each skill, results appear in green (% of students meeting benchmark), yellow (% of students progressing towards benchmark), and red (% of students not making adequate progress towards benchmark). Definitions and examples of the skills assessed and represented on the chart below can be [can be found here](#).



Instructional Rounds. On March 8th, the elementary leadership team (principals, instructional coaches, and curriculum coordinators) conducted instructional rounds at the ECEC. Instructional rounds provide district leaders with important insights into teaching and learning in classrooms around the district. Rounds focus on specific areas of practice or strategic improvement that the District is targeting. This series of rounds at the ECEC focused practitioners on the extent to which children have opportunities to engage in oral language skill development. During the visit, the leadership team observed students engage in discussion with peers and adults through buddy reading and teacher modeling, sing songs, practice reading words that follow the consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) pattern, and build words and sentences collaboratively with their peers.



Bren Bataclan Visit. Bren Bataclan (Boston based artist) visited the district for a week-long artist-in-residency involving all 5th-grade students across the elementary schools. Mr. Bataclan's residency focused on spreading kindness through art and the creative process. He visited each school for an entire day (Monday-Thursday) spending time discussing spreading kindness in our community and creating artwork with students. On Friday Mr. Bataclan conducted a 45 min workshop at each school to help students write artist statements about their work highlighting the importance of literacy and writing in the art-making process. This was made possible by a generous grant from the Dedham Education Foundation (DEF) and the hard work of the elementary visual art teachers (Kristin Prata, Sarah Altone, and Sarah Oliveri). Mr. Bataclan's residency was a great success and an important part of *Youth Art Month*. [Additional photos from Mr. Bataclan's residency can be found here.](#)



Johnny Appleseed. Nearly 50 Oakdale students presented the mini-musical, Johnny Appleseed, under the direction of music teacher Christopher Molinaro, assisted by teachers Bridget Kelly, Claire Eisenberg, and Michelle Blanchard. Students and families enjoyed exuberant singing, adorable dances and clever dialogue that told the story of this great American pioneer, his respect and appreciation for nature, and his kind hearted reverence for all humankind.



Visit to Costa Rica. Ms. Abby Zuckerman and Ms. Allison Guiffaro accompanied 26 sophomores, juniors and seniors to four regions of Costa Rica. The trip focused on the students not only expanding their language skills, but expanding their knowledge about the biodiversity that Costa Rica has to offer the world. The first three days were spent in the Monteverde region, in the northern cloud forest of Costa Rica where the students learned first hand about coffee growing from bean to cup, they were guided through the process as well as organic and self sustainable farming. Then they continued on by doing different community service projects and it was inspiring to see them grow in character.

The next three days were spent in the rainforest of Arenal and its surrounding beauty. We hiked towards the volcano in Arenal National park, We only got as close as was allowed and we were impressed by the lava formations. One of the pictures shows us in front of a 400 yr old tree in the rainforest which is very uncommon. We enjoyed a nice break in the hot springs!

We visited the ASIA Preserve where they rehabilitate animals back into the wild. We learned why it is against the law to keep macaws, monkeys, and sloths and why they should not be kept as domesticated pets. We then visited a butterfly preserve in the middle of the rainforest where the environmentalists shared with us each stage of the butterflies life and we touched and got to play with them. The owner also roasted cacao and took us through the process of how chocolate is ground and we sampled 100 percent pure chocolate which was a staple of the natives to the country. While leaving we challenged a local group of Costa Rican students to a game of fútbol which was entertaining to watch especially since our side was stacked with some phenomenal DHS players from the girls' team.

For entertainment at night we had the students put on a good old fashion talent show. Our guide, Adrian and our driver Hector were the judges. It was a fun night and certainly one to remember because we were awoken at 5am by howler monkeys which Ms. Guifarro thought was a puma outside our lodge. The noise they make is incredible and in the morning as we left the monkeys were playfully swinging from the trees as we left. Clearly they got more sleep than we did!

Our last day was spent in the capital city touring around and using our Spanish to buy souvenirs. Costa Rica left a lasting impression in our hearts and we are proud of the students for getting out of their comfort zone in Dedham and learning about self sustainability among other things, and ultimately becoming global citizens of the world.

Additional photos [can be found here.](#)



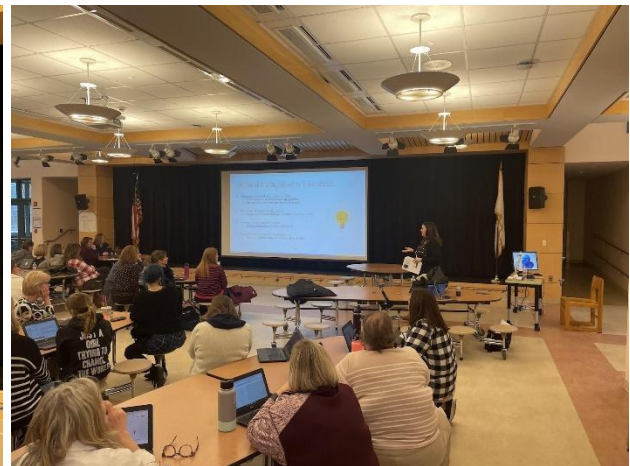
Professional Development

Inquiry Journeys. On Tuesday, March 7th, our team of instructional coaches participated in a workshop on [differentiation](#) with Inquiry Journeys to support teachers and students participation in the pilot.



LiPS Training (Part II). On March 8-9, special education teachers, related service providers and interventionists participated in LiPS training. [LiPS](#) is a phoneme sequencing program developed by Lindamood-Bell.

Early Release Day. On March 2nd, educators across the district participated in professional development. [Topics may be found here.](#)



Community Engagement

Avery and Greenlodge voluntary faculty meetings. On March 6th and 8th I visited the Avery and Greenlodge schools for voluntary faculty meetings as part of my continued efforts to connect with faculty and staff and continue developing a deep understanding of the strategic needs of the District as we prepare to onboard our next Superintendent of Schools. Meetings were well attended and I am grateful for the thoughtful and honest dialog and feedback that faculty and staff provided during these conversations.

Tri-County Superintendent's Legislative Breakfast. On March 3rd I attended the Tri-County Superintendent's legislative breakfast at Newton's City Hall with Dr. Pearrow and incoming Superintendent Nan Murphy. Superintendents from Norfolk, Middlesex, and Worcester Counties along with School Committee Chairs, and legislators convened to [discuss pressing fiscal issues](#) for FY24 and their direct impact on students and schools across the state. The Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS) has established [key legislative priorities](#) which target economic relief from the state to offset extraordinary increases to the costs of goods and services in FY24.

District Curriculum Advisory Focus Groups. On March 13th, members of the District Curriculum Advisory facilitated focus groups for families. The first of two events held in March, took place at Dedham Middle School where families had dinner and our DELTA high school volunteers provided babysitting. The [agenda](#) for the evening can be found here, as well as a list of the focus group questions facilitators asked.

Management and Operations

DHS Turf Field. The turf replacement project at the high school is moving through the administrative phase of the project. The turf design has been approved with the help of our Athletic Director Steve Traister, and the order has been placed with the factory for the production of the carpet. The bid documents for the installation of the turf are being developed by the town Procurement Officer Rana Mana-Doerfer and are expected to be released by the end of March with an anticipated bid due date in mid April. Twice monthly meetings have been scheduled for the high school team and will be held internally until the project is completed.

COMMENTS on the Interim Superintendent update

Ms. White asked if we could send info to the neighbors about when the work will start on the DHS Turf Field.

Dr. Kelly replied that once they have the schedule, they will send a flyer out to the neighbors.

Reports/Updates/Requests

- Literacy Strategic Planning – Dr. Heather Smith and Dr. Sara Stetson

Dr. Sara Stetson and Dr. Heather Smith presented slides that showed an overview and update of the literacy strategic plan.

Strategic Plan

The Mass. Literacy Guide was launched by DESE in 2021 as a guide on how to support students with core literacy skills. Dr. Smith was a team member on the development of that plan. This past summer a two-day leadership conference was held in Dedham on literacy. The DPS literacy strategic plan strives to support general and special education literacy needs with a focus on equity.

Dr. Stetson has been active in educating administrators about dyslexia including those outside the district and country. She is pleased that the Mass. Legislature just adopted important legislation to support dyslexia education.

Dr. Smith said that they will start piloting new instructional materials now that a curriculum is in place. Each year a new content area will go under review in Pre-K-12.

The DPS Curriculum Review Cycle will put in place a seven-year academic review cycle. The phases of that cycle are as follows:

- 2022-23: Curriculum Analysis, Piloting of new materials and programs.
- 2024-25: Develop and adopt new curriculum and train educators
- 2026-27: Train all teachers, implement and monitor curriculum
- 2027-28: Evaluate the success of the new programs.

Dedham applied for, but was not awarded, the Growing Literacy Equity Across Massachusetts (GLEAM) grant. However the application process afforded the district with the opportunity to jump start goals and helped to write the strategic plan.

The Literacy Leadership Team involved Dedham administrators, faculty and administration. They looked into bringing on board the Early Bird and Start Phonics assessments and they are currently evaluating the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment. Dr. Stetson said the DIBELS8 is a strong assessment for undertaking Universal Screening for all grades. The screening process needs to be done carefully because we don't want to miss anyone. The adoption of new literacy assessment tools will allow Dedham to move past the Level Literacy Intervention (LLI) program that was used in previous years.

DIBELS8 is currently being piloted in classrooms in grades K-5. If the DIBELS8 demonstrates successful outcomes then it will replace Early Bird, STAR Reading and STAR Early Literacy assessment programs. DIBELS8 allows progress monitoring on whether the target intervention is helping the student.

Dr. Smith discussed the new programs that are currently being piloted.

Dr. Stetson talked about an oral language curriculum that uses visualization for students with learning disabilities and added that they are running the Orton Gillingham training program for teachers.

The overarching goal is to develop a full menu of targeted programs for literacy, and by June 2025 it is expected that all students in Grade 3 will be in the proficiency category for literacy.

COMMENTS on the Literacy Program

Ms. Briggs commented that historically DESE gives us mandates without providing any funding. Dr. Stetson said they have been successful in diverting some contracts to targeted areas for training and implementation of specialized instruction. She said they will continue to work for creative funding sources.

Mr. Donati asked about DIBELS vs. Early Bird. Dr. Stetson said that K 1 classrooms are piloting the DIBELS assessment. Others are still using the STAR Reading.

Dr. Stetson said she spent a lot of time on dyslexia advocacy across the state. Dr. Kelly said the decision to have an Asst. Superintendent adds to heightened collaboration and more successful programs. Dr. Stetson and Dr. Smith are working to leverage all of our resources. Dr. Stetson applauded Dr. Smith's efforts and Dr. Smith said the feeling is mutual and she said we have been trying to utilize the trainer model.

Mr. Polito asked if other states have state funding for literacy programs. Dr. Stetson said there is a mixed funding model. Mr. Polito asked if there was a followup to make sure no students are missed during evaluation in Grades 1-3. Dr. Stetson said they can keep testing in 4th and 5th grades to capture any missed students. She is hoping that they will get so good at early intervention, that we won't need to continue the constant evaluation.

Mr. Polito asked about the timing and flexibility of assessments. Dr. Stetson said teachers could evaluate a class in one week using these assessments. Interventions can be modified and implemented almost immediately.

Dr. Stetson said that dyslexia is not diagnosed with screeners, we are notifying parents directly when there is risk identified in that area. If the first level of intervention is not successful, then we will move to higher levels of intervention.

Ms. McCormick thinks that we should be better at sharing the work we are doing with students on a regular basis. It's important to let parents know that our district is at the forefront of learning. She asked about feedback on the grant that was submitted.

Dr. Smith said that the grant application received strong scores, but there were more grants than could be funded. The state needs to support districts and we are told that there will be more opportunities in the future.

Ms. Briggs hopes that there is still success even if we don't reach 100% of our goals.

- Discussion & Vote of School Building Project Education Plan

[Polito recused himself from the School Committee due to conflict of interest.]

Dr. Kelly said he needs the Committee's support tonight on the Education Plan. A draft document was presented at the March 1st School Committee meeting. The Visioning Committee, composed of 35 parents, faculty, central office administration and district leadership and led by New Vista Design, has been collaborating to develop the educational model to inform the MSBA about our needs in the new space. Each section talks about the current educational situation in Dedham and then what we want to change. Dr. Kelly said he met with the architects to ensure that the current space summaries supported the Education Plan accurately. The plan is 95% complete.

Dr. Kelly said the Education Plan includes a broad overview of who we serve and the age of the current facilities. This section clarifies grade spans and policies. The desired class size is 16-18 for Grades 1-5. Current class configuration and scheduling is summarized.

The Educational Philosophy and Mission section states the overarching goals. This will inform the broad architectural design of the new school. He said the focus was on how the new facility reflects Dedham and the communities served by the school.

Jon Levi, director of design for the project came to the podium. He said the visioning group wasn't a committee, it was an open call that had input from a wide variety of people from the community.

Dr. Kelly said that in addition to defining spaces for general instruction, physical space was defined for performing arts, special education, breakout small groups, and other school services. The transportation section will require further work, but should be completed in a couple of weeks.

Space summaries for the 235, 450 and 550 enrollments reflect different space structures and cohort groupings. Includes MSBA guidelines for enrollment and program recommendations.

More work needs to be done on food services and transportation.

COMMENTS on the Education Plan

Mr. Donati acknowledged the clarity of the document. He said he would be comfortable voting on this tonight.

Ms. White thanked everyone for the work that people did on this to make it readable and understandable.

Ms. Briggs commended the team and the document.

Mr. Hebert appreciated that the document showed what we do now and how we can make it better.

Motion was made to approve the School Building Project Education Plan as presented tonight. Motion was approved by a vote of 7-0.

Subcommittee Updates

- SBRC

Mr. Hebert said the SBRC Subcommittee met on Monday with the architects and Vertex.

Jonathan Levi commented that the educational plan is distinctive from other districts. The educator planning and development section is an important aspect that has not been included by other districts.

Steve Theran, Vertex Project Manager, reviewed the schedule for the Oakdale Project.

- Community meetings will be held about the Enrollment decision.
- Submit PDP by end of March
- Once one location/design option is selected, schematic design and cost estimates are due by the end of December 2023.
- Preferred Schematic Report (PSR) includes enrollment decisions.

COMMENTS on the Oakdale Project

Ms. Briggs asked about the community survey they had talked about. She also feels that making a decision by June with two new School Committee members coming on in April may be difficult. She asked what the impact would be if they did not submit the PSR in June?

Mr. Donati asked who approved the timeline change?

John Tocci, Chair of the SBRC explained that several members didn't want to have such a big submission take place at the end of July due to summer vacations. He said there is still a possibility to submit in July.

Ms. White wanted to know why they could not have the extra four weeks to get newer members up to speed. John Tocci said they never took a vote on it so that the deadlines could be flexible.

Dr. Kelly asked if we don't submit the PSR in June, how would it affect the timeline? He said we need to plan on a May 2024 Town Meeting vote.

Mr. Tocci said we need to submit the schematic design by December 2023. We could still work out the timeline and make the 2024 Town Meeting date.

Dr. Pearrow asked about the community forums. Mr. Tocci said there will be additional community meetings and joint School and SBRC meetings other than the ones that are currently showing up on the calendar.

Ms. White said that the School Committee promised that a survey would be delivered.

Mr. Hebert said that at the least SBRC there was talk about taking major sites off. He asked that the decision about eliminating more sites should wait until the School Committee could be involved in that decision.

Mr. Hebert said we have time to do the survey before the next public forum. The Committee agreed about the importance of doing a community survey.

Mr. Tocci said there are 16 options on the table now. We don't want people to vote on all those options. The only option voted off was the Striar/Capen option. The SBRC did not vote on the 450 combined Oakdale/Riverdale at Riverdale or combined Oakdale/Riverdale at Oakdale. We are now left with 14 options. He said they have solicited a good deal of input from the public, but we have not done a survey.

Mr. Donati said he would have been shocked if the Oakdale/Riverdale sites would have been voted on without the School Committee input.

Ms. Briggs said we are down to five sites: Riverdale, Oakdale, Greenlodge, Striar and Capen.

Ms. White said she didn't mean that there has been no public input. The School Committee talked about a survey, however, the idea may not have been conveyed to the SBRC.

Mr. Hebert said the SBRC had a working group meeting coming up and the survey idea will be raised. Dr. Kelly said that the schools could help develop and disseminate the survey.

They discussed Amanda Smith and Sara Errickson's involvement with the survey.

Dr. Pearrow said we need systematic feedback from the community and she is hopeful that there could be next steps discussed at the next SBRC meeting for developing the survey. She appreciates that the SBRC is hearing our requests. Mr. Tocci wants more guidance from the School Committee on how the survey should look. He thinks it may be early, but he agrees that we should not have more sites eliminated without larger public feedback.

Dr. Pearrow said Dr. Kelly will be the point person on the design of the survey. Dr. Kelly reinforced that he will need help to know what the School Committee wants to learn to help frame the survey. Then he will work with JLA, Vertex and SBRC to keep it moving.

- Budget

Mr. Polito said they will be hearing from FinCom but the meeting was canceled due to weather. Rescheduled for Tuesday.

- Communications

Ms. McCormick said there are no updates, but they are happy to schedule a meeting to collaborate about the Oakdale Project survey.

- Curriculum Advisory

Dr. Smith said the first set of focus groups were held on Monday. Delta students from the High School attended. Participation from eight families and more families registered for March 30.

Dr. Kelly said the School Committee and Dr. Smith has been on the forefront of this topic. The Newton school district contacted him about what we are doing. Ms. McCormick said that it's great to involve the community.

- Policy

No updates.

- Traffic Circulation

No updates.

- Negotiations

Ms. White said they met a week ago and there will be information to discuss at the next meeting.

- Parks & Recreation

No updates.

Donations

No donations.

Review and Approval Vote of Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion was made to approve the minutes from March 1, 2023 and approved by a vote of 6-0. (Ms. Briggs abstained because she was absent at the March 1, 2023 meeting).

Old/New Business

Mr. Polito asked if the Executive Session minutes could be reviewed before the School Board membership changed in April.

Acknowledgements and Announcements

- Mr. Donati said he attended a 5th grade students fundraiser where the students were waiters and waitresses.
- Ms. White said Cinderella is this weekend from Friday – Sunday.
- She acknowledged that so many teams got into post season play. She acknowledged that Catherine Sargent has broken records and is a national winner in shot put.
- Spelling Bee is next Thursday for 3-5 graders.

Executive Session – Exemption 3 – To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation

Roll call vote was taken to adjourn the meeting and move to Executive Session.

Submitted by

Virginia Quinn

Recording Secretary