

**Dedham Public Schools  
School Committee Meeting  
May 17, 2023**

**MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE:**

Victor Hebert  
Stephen Acosta (absent)  
Mayanne Briggs  
Dr. Leah Flynn Gallant  
Cailen McCormick  
Christopher Polito  
Tara Duncan (absent)

**MEMBERS OF THE ADMINISTRATION:**

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.

Pledge of Allegiance

Open Meeting

Mr. Victor Hebert, Chair, called the meeting to order.

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

**Teaching and Learning**



Grade 5 Human Growth & Development Lessons Begin. On Monday, May 15th, educators will launch the Grade 5 Human Growth & Development lessons. Slides for the lessons were shared with Grade 5 families on May 5th and the live Q & A for families, which occurred on May 1st, was well attended!

DHS Acting 3. The DHS Acting 3 students put on a short play for the DELTA students: Tortoise vs.

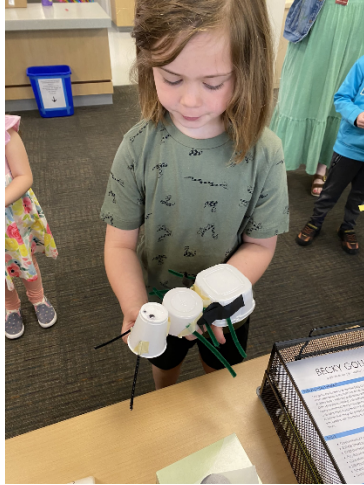


Hare 2: This Time It's Personal!, a short comedy by Sean Abley. The play depicts a rematch of the fabled race between the great-grandchildren of the original slow-and-steady Tortoise and bragging Hare. It features lessons about good sportsmanship, friendship and generosity. DELTA students also enjoyed being on the stage, learning about some stage secrets (the wings, where props are kept, and the giant costume closet) as well as how the lights move! Acting 3 students are (from left to right) Kate Tocci, Susie Plunkett, Olivia Annatone, AJ Castillo and Brendan Greeley.



Mashpee Wampanoag Visits to Grade 3 Classrooms. All of our students in Grade 3 welcomed (or will welcome) visitors from the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe to celebrate the Wampanoag New Year! DPS was able to accomplish this through a DEF grant that we acquired in the fall in order to address the Grade 3 History & Social Sciences Standards. The schedule can be found [here](#).

ECEC STREAM (Science, Technology, Reading, Engineering, Arts, and Math/Music). Every month, the ECEC learners are engaged in STREAMing during their specialist classes. STREAMing is a cross-curricular, integrated, and thematic approach to learning where students enjoy activities from science, technology, reading, engineering, arts, and math/music. This month, the theme was BUGS, a connection to the Kindergarten Science unit of Living Things. Students engaged in imaginative play with insect costumes, created their own insects with recyclable materials, and dug in the dirt to find hidden bugs as just a few of the activities.



The 18th Annual DHS Media Film Festival and Scully Awards are this Wednesday, May 17th, at 7pm in the DHS Auditorium. This festival will showcase student work from the current school year, with an Oscar-like awards ceremony in which students are recognized for their work. This event brings students, parents, staff, and members of the community together to see how hard these students work during the school year and to enjoy their creative productions. We hope you will come out to see the amazing projects our students have created!

Film Festival Nominees can be found [here](#).

**Program Enhancements at DHS.** There have been a number of questions and concerns raised recently about adjustments being made to the Alternative (ALT) program at DHS. I wanted to take a moment to address a few misunderstandings about the District's plans on this front. Between July and December Dr. Stetson initiated and completed a comprehensive review of student services programming PK-22. The data Dr. Stetson collected and reviewed indicated, amongst other things, that there is an acute need for (1) continuity of programming in the PK-22 span and (2) highly specialized and evidence based therapeutic curriculum and interventions to meet the needs of all learners. The ALT program at DHS is not being eliminated. The program is being enhanced to (1) align to the elementary and middle school programs that children participate in, (2) increase student inclusion and belonging, and (3) incorporate highly specialized, evidenced based curriculum to address the needs of participating students. This is an amazing opportunity for children and families and will most certainly improve outcomes for the people the program serves and the faculty who operate the program.

Dr. Stetson said there are different levels of care, and the new program provides more options for student health needs. They will be adding programs for potential dropouts, adding internal behavioral health specialists and increasing flexibility for academic options.

Dr. Kelly said that he has responded to all the comments from the public and community. And he would be willing to provide more info to them about program enhancements.

## Professional Development

District Leadership Team. On May 16, the District Leadership Team met with attorney Cat Lyons to discuss the “alternatives to discipline” as part of c.71 § 37H ¾. 37H ¾ is one of a number of statutes that govern processes and procedures associated with suspension and expulsion in public schools across the Commonwealth. These laws are updated periodically and it is incumbent upon local districts to ensure that administrators have a full understanding of their implications for practice.



## Community Engagement



Boston Globe Visits Dedham. On Friday, May 5th, the Boston Globe visited classrooms at Avery and ECEC to learn more about how Dedham is meeting the literacy needs of students. During the visits, Globe reporters had the chance to see Reader’s Workshop in Grades K-1 and interviewed teachers and coaches about changes they’ve already made to align their instruction to the science of reading. The story will be published in a multi-part series on the state of literacy curriculum, instruction, and assessment across Massachusetts.

DHS Best Buddies Program Recognized as 2023 Outstanding High School Chapter in Massachusetts. Dedham Public Schools started Best Buddies in the Winter of 2022. In one year the club has tripled in membership. They have developed an inclusive community where all members are seen, have developed 1:1 friendships, instilled the three keys to friendship: positivity, consistency, and vulnerability, and worked to engage not only students but also faculty members. The DHS Best Buddies program has

also established connections within the Dedham community and surrounding communities. We are now nominated to win National Chapter of the Year, and this July, Isabella Annatonne (student) , incoming President, Stephanie Latorella (teacher) and Louise D'Amato will attend the National Conference in Bloomington Indiana where they will be presented with a plaque. As part of their submission, the students created a video which will be available soon and shared with the community.

Best Buddies programs help people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) form meaningful friendships with their peers, secure successful jobs, live independently, and develop self-advocacy and communication skills.

"Your chapter absolutely deserves this as we have been blown away by all the good that is happening here; you all really do epitomize our mission of inclusion. We are so grateful to your team of advisors and student leaders that make this all possible and to all of your incredible students that lead by example and show others what kindness and inclusion truly look like. " - KRISTA THURSTONE , Deputy Director of Programs, Best Buddies International

### **Management and Operations**

Jeanne Johnson - Dedham School Nutrition Director named as the Northeast region Director of the Year. The national, non-profit School Nutrition Association (SNA) recognized Jeanne for her many positive changes to the school nutrition program in Dedham. The award called out Jeanne's efforts to ensure that despite the challenges presented by our Elementary schools with no cafeterias or kitchens, Jeanne's solutions help us provide those elementary school students with the same freshly made, high-quality meals as the middle and high school students. It also recognized her creation of our breakfast program, as well as her work in our classrooms, and with the school nutrition community at a local level.

Johnson was announced as the Northeast region Director of the Year during an online awards ceremony on May 2 in advance of School Lunch Hero Day, celebrated on May 5, 2023, to honor all of America's dedicated school nutrition professionals. The news release was featured in The Dedham Times May 5th issue, on all our school webpages and also shared with the community through Town Hall news. Jeanne has also been featured on School Nutrition's TrayTalk blog. You can link to directly to the blog here:  
<https://traytalk.org/2023/05/03/celebrating-school-nutrition-directors-for-their-dedication/>

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS on the Superintendent's Update**

**Kathy Meegan 170 Harding Terr.** said she has two kids at DHS and is also a teacher at DHS in the Alternative Program. She feels that the program has allowed students to stay in the community and feel connected to their school. She was informed that the district was going to dismantle the Alternative Program as of Fall 2024. She has not yet been told what services would be replacing the program. She is worried that the elimination of the program will affect current

IUPs. She thanked Dr. Kelly for sharing some information about the process tonight. She said that the Alternative Program has been in existence since 1992 and has helped students stay in school and graduate.

**Josh Langmead, 12 Border St.,** said this has been a busy year for the School Committee. The School Committee was tasked to create a budget that included job cuts. He feels that the job was well done and the Town Meeting vote speaks to the support of the DPS administration and School Committee. As a Town Meeting representative, he proposed that if cuts are needed in the budget in the future, if Town Meeting could be provided with the information at an earlier date.

**Andrew Czazasty, 118 Sprague St.** said that the Spring Town Meeting voted to appropriate \$5k more than FinCom advised. He pointed out that this does not happen often. The extra money came with the expectation that it would go to special programs such as performing arts and library services. He hopes that the expectations will be honored. He also hopes to see a focus on reducing administrative costs in the future.

**Jack Minor, 30 Chauncy St.,** former Alternative Program graduate from 2005 expressed his support for the Alternative program. He said the program provided a strong connection with teachers and fellow students.

**Anthony Vicente,** 2019 Graduate of the Alternative program said that at one time he wanted to drop out of Dedham High and this program contributed to his ability to become a successful employee of the Kraft Group at the age of 23. He thinks we shouldn't fix something that's not broken.

**Katy Lundy,** was a 2012 graduate of the Dedham High Alternative program. She had anxiety attacks in a previous school and was out of school until she discovered the Dedham High Alternative Program. She said the program helped her develop a sense of comfort. The teachers were empathetic and afforded her a network of peers that gave her the tools to face society. She was able to return to the mainstream classrooms in her senior year. She attended Regis College and got her Masters in Special Education. She is currently managing her own home daycare program.

**Nancy Sullivan,** spent 20 years as Director of Special Education and Student Services at DHS. She explained that the reasons the Alternative School started was to supply internal support and academics for a specialized group of students. Students needed to be educated in the Town and the Town saved money with the program. Parents were instrumental in developing the program and it was a model program for the TEC.

**Dennis McGraff** was an adjustment counselor for the Alternative Program for 17 years. He retired from DHS in 2010. He doesn't think bringing in outside clinicians is an optimal way of providing therapy to SPED students. He asked that the DPS Administration and School Committee members think outside of the box to support the teachers and build strong special education programs.

**Sara Clancy, Willow St.** graduated from DHS in 2014. She worked at the Alternative Program while attending the UMass Psychology Masters Program. She does not agree with the decision to disband the Alternative Program. She is not sure that the curriculum change is an Enhancement or a Disbanding. The kids in the program need consistency and strong foundational relationships. She is concerned about the timeline. Her main job last year was to help make sure students graduated. The program already includes wrap around services and therapeutics. She hopes that the people who have been working so hard in this program will be included in the communication process.

**Janet Holmes, Charlesbank Rd.** Grandson is currently attending the Alternative Program. The staff go above and beyond to keep the family informed and be part of the educational process. She feels that this program is the best and if they dismantle it, they won't make the program better.

**Sharon Teles, 51 Trimount St.,** said as a Social Worker, and mother of three children at DPS, she is concerned that major changes in Special Education are being made so quickly. She is afraid that this will disrupt IUPs. She feels that this would be detrimental to the school budget with out-of-district costs. She feels there hasn't been enough information being disseminated about these changes. She encourages better communication around these changes.

## RECOGNITIONS

Dr. Heather Smith spoke about recognizing the 7<sup>th</sup> grade students and faculty who built the Asian Influence and Culture Exhibit at the Town Hall. She recognized the teachers who worked on the project. Ms. Randall and Ms. LeClair were chosen as fellows to train future teachers in the curriculum.

The students who created the exhibit came to the podium and each talked about their experiences. Slides were displayed to provide a visual depiction of the exhibit. Each exhibit had a Curator and Project Leader. Ms. Randall commended the instructional coaches. The students presented their work at Town Meeting as well. She thanked the Dedham Historical Society Director and Sarah Errickson for being instrumental in making this a successful exhibit. Lisa LeClair thanked Nancy Baker, Assistant Town Manager, Karen Hillman, Principal DMS, and the DMS custodians. The event was attended by about 300 community members.

## COMMENTS on the Asian Culture Exhibit

Mr. Polito commended all the work that was involved in the exhibit. The presentation by the students was also well done.



Dr. Smith said that the Asian Exhibit was not a packaged curriculum. The teachers designed it themselves. The next exhibit will be on the Roman Trials and will also be presented at Town Hall. Students will take on different roles that mirror the Roman Trials.

Ms. Briggs congratulated the students for their strong presentation skills.

Dr. Flynn Gallant commented on the strong interactive element of the exhibit.

Mr. Hebert said he was there on opening night and he was amazed at all the work that went into it. Students were impressed with their own peers.

Dr. Kelly said the teachers who were involved in the project have become strong curriculum innovators.

#### SCHOOL COMMITTEE COMMENTS on the Superintendent's Update

Dr. Flynn Gallant asked about how the Administration plans are to better communicate changes made to curriculum about the Alternative Program.

Dr. Stetson replied the changes being made are an effort to create individual plans. She said she would be happy to develop a Q&A about the curriculum changes and could focus on the program components in their new quarterly magazine. She affirmed that there has been communication between faculty and administration about the curriculum. Dr. Stetson reported that Dedham has one of the highest Special Education dropout rates of similar towns. She feels that Dedham needs to go further in their Special Education programs.

Ms. McCormick thinks there could be more communication with families and faculty to close the disconnect. She said families need to know that we are not going against IUPs. Dr. Stetson said Ed Paris and she are holding a brief drop in for elementary, middle and high school levels.

Mr. Polito asked about the degree of change that is expected.

Dr. Stetson replied to some of the criticisms raised tonight. She said she never used the word dismantle or enhancement. She said the goal is to implement best practices for mental health care. Change can be difficult.

Some of the key areas of focus are:

- implementing a curriculum backed with great research-based data.
- planning to add Administrative Consults.
- continuing to implement the home based model with core teachers.
- extending programs to new students.
- no outside clinicians will be utilized, but they will be using Boston College interns.
- future goals may include the use of outside clinicians to help overcome barriers of support.



Dr. Stetson explained that models have changed and we now have to work with students in the least restrictive environment. Programs can no longer be restricted in order to comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The goals are to increase education options and to try to make sure that equal opportunities are afforded in all programs. Co-teaching in math has shown good results. She commented that the Alternative Program began in 1992 and post pandemic issues require new approaches. School Districts are now becoming places to focus on mental health.

Dr. Kelly said they need to move quickly in order to capture the post-pandemic problems.

Ms. Briggs said IUPs won't change based on services. She wants to make sure that faculty and staff that are affected by the changes are kept in the loop.

Dr. Stetson assured Ms. Briggs that the faculty involved in the changes are informed and will continue to be informed of the process.

Dr. Flynn Gallant commented that she would like to see a Q&A that includes a glossary and explanations of terminology.

Dr. Stetson reported that one-page informational documents with explanations about curriculum changes have been produced and are available on the website and outlined in the issue of the magazine to all parents. She also said she would be willing to create a Q&A about the curriculum changes as well.

Mr. Polito asked who is responsible for the decisions being made on the new curriculum? Dr. Stetson said curricula are narrowed down by category by specialist. They are generally building on a core program that is the gold standard. Dr. Dube and she are aware of the current best practices. The approach is to put components together that are flexible, intentional and measurable. She stressed the importance of looking at the overall experience for students. Some are falling through the cracks.

Dr. Kelly said he relies on Dr. Stetson and Dr. Smith to protect the district from liability and to make sound decisions on the behalf of students and teachers.

Mr. Polito asked for an update on the Social Studies pilot. He also asked about the film festival schedule.

#### District School and Improvement Plan

Dr. Kelly explained that there are two documents in the folder. Tonight he will be referencing the 6-pg Executive Summary of 2023-25 District Improvement Plan that provides a summary of

the longer document. In the next month they will be having discussion on the details of the full plan.

Dr. Kelly said the last time the District Improvement Plan was approved was in 2017-18. At that time, seven plans were consolidated into two plans: Elementary and Secondary. This year, there is a single document: District and School Improvement Plan.

He displayed the salient goals included in the Executive Summary.

### **Overview of District Improvement Goals for 2023-25**

Goal #1: Academic Achievement, Excellence and Rigor -- goal is for 80% of students in Grades 3-8 on the Spring MCAT 2023 tests.

Goal #2: Culture, Climate, and Belonging -- goal is for 80% of students to respond favorably to school fit and belonging as measured by the Panorama Surveys.

Goal #3: Management and Operations -- goal is for 100% of employees to have formal job descriptions and associated performance evaluations, 100% of capital repairs will have development and tracking mechanisms, 100% implementation of safety and security measures.

### **Overview of District Strategic Initiatives for 2023-25**

Dr. Kelly said he will be working with Mr. Wells, Dr. Stetson and Dr. Smith on identifying strategic areas of focus. Each strategic initiative is categorized by department focus and linked to district goals.

Key focal areas are:

- Dyslexia intervention
- Literacy intervention models for K-8
- Systems of Care for Behavioral and Mental Health.

Principals of each school came to podium to provide summary of their strategic initiatives:

#### ECEC -- Principal Kim Taylor

Goal #1: Academic Excellence -- expand integrated instruction across curricula areas.

Focus on integration of playful learning.

Goal #2: Social and Emotional Health and Learning -- interventions for the youngest learners created by post-pandemic issues

#3 Family and Community Engagement -- Enhance school wide engagement by building on diversity.

#### Avery -- Principal Ed Paris

Goal #1: Trauma-informed Practice -- Identify needs early and review student-to-clinician ratios.  
Professional development of staff.

Goal #2: Master Schedule Planning for teaching and learning – implementing process for

Goal #3: Chronic Absenteeism – close gaps of the 15% of students who are chronically absent.

#### Greenlodge – Principal Jennifer McGowan

Goal #1: Differentiation of Instruction -- Targeting writing skills and enrichment for higher learners.

Goal #2: Systems and structures to enhance emotional learning -- Broaden peer leadership.

Goal #3: Connecting instructional strategies between home and school – developing common language to support students at home

#### Oakdale -- Principal Kimberly Hermes

Goal #1: Student Emotional Health – classroom readiness skills.

Goal #2 Academic Excellence -- Evaluating curriculum and assessment tools for all levels.

Goal #3: Community Engagement -- ensure community engagement in the Oakdale project.

#### Riverdale -- Principal Dana Bennett

Goal #1: Academic Excellence – analyzing data with instructional coach

Goal #2: Social and Emotional Learning – involve stakeholders to create space for students to share their voices

Goal #3: Community and Family Engagement – goal is 100% family participation.

#### Middle School – Principal Karen Hillman

General Focus on giving students leadership and voice.

Goal #1: Writing – developing common rubrics, incorporating writing into all subjects.

Goal #2: Data-driven Interventions and Supports – Increasing academic, behavioral and therapeutic support.

#### High School – Assistant Principal Peter Cavanaugh (taking place of Principal Forrest)

Goal #1: Evaluation of Alternatives to CP2 Level Courses for lifelong learners.

Goal #2: Enhancing Rigor in all content areas – defining common beliefs of academic excellence.

Goal #3: Trauma-informed Practice – starting with professional development for CP2 teachers and then branching out to greater staff.

Goal #4 – Creating Inclusive Representative Spaces -- bringing in speakers with focus on diversity and shared experiences.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE COMMENTS on district improvement plan

Ms. Briggs said the most common focus heard by School Committee members is on culture, climate and belonging and academic excellence. She said the strategic plans are clear and she hopes that they are shared with the parents. She wants to make sure that the Administration is forthcoming with the resources required to make their endeavors successful so that the School Committee can best support the process.

Dr. Flynn Gallant commented on the importance of challenging the students in the middle. She would like to see additional AP class options.

Mr. Polito asked about the overlapping of goals from the last iteration of the improvement plan. Dr. Kelly said he would upload the 2020 improvement plan so the School Committee could compare the plans.

Ms. McCormick asked about the benefits of establishing different goals at each elementary school rather than setting three common goals for all elementary schools?

Principal Ed Paris explained that each school needs to be nuanced because the demographics and physical plant environments in each school are different. He feels this group of administrators are highly collaborative and their team approach will ensure their alignment of focus.

Mr. Hebert said it's important to know that the principals think of themselves as a team.

Dr. Kelly highlighted the importance of having highly competent, collaborative leaders in the district.

Ms. Briggs thanked the administration for including management and operations in the improvement plan.

#### Update on Oakdale School Project (Steve Theran and John Tocci)

[Mr. Polito recused himself due to conflict of interest.]

Steve Theran, Vertex Project Manager reported that a tour of two schools designed by Jon Levi Architects will be held on Monday. Mr. Theran displayed a slide with upcoming meeting schedules and deadlines.

Mr. Tocci said the focus of the May 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting will be finance. Town Managers and FinCom members will be present. It will be a chance for the SBRC and public to hear the logistics of the funding process. Discussion about the most advantageous enrollment scenarios will also take place at that meeting. The meeting will be held at Town Hall and available on Zoom. Deadline for the Oakdale Project survey is May 23<sup>rd</sup>.

### Letter of Intent vote for Solar Project

Dr. Kelly clarified that the final draft of the LOI is the May 12th version. The LOI gives permission to Solect Energy to begin the design process. Dr. Kelly said Mr. Giles from Solect pointed out that the PPA rates are projected rates and could change, but in the end, only one final composite rate will exist for all schools. The longer we wait to start the project, the lesser the financial incentive.

***Motion was made to authorize Dr. Kelly to sign the May 12, 2023 Letter of Intent for Solect Energy that includes four sites. Motion was approved by a vote of 5-0. (Mr. Acosta was absent).***

### Public Hearing for School Choice

***Public Hearing was opened with a roll call vote of 5-0. (Mr. Acosta was absent).***

Dr. Kelly summarized the Mass. General Law that established school choice in 1991. If schools want to opt out of school choice they can do so with a public hearing. Dedham has historically made the decision to opt out of School Choice. Choosing not to participate prohibits us from enrolling School Choice students. Mr. Kelly explained that when a child chooses out, state aid follows them and can create revenue for the district that they choose to attend. Our current enrollments show that it would be financially wise to opt out of School Choice so Mr. Kelly's recommendation is again to opt out of School Choice.

***Public Hearing was closed with a roll call vote of 5-0. (Mr. Acosta was absent).***

***Motion was made to accept the recommendation of the Interim Superintendent to not enroll in School Choice. Motion was approved by a vote of 5-0. (Mr. Acosta was absent).***

### Subcommittee Updates

#### • Budget

No updates

#### • Communication (removed)

No updates

#### • Curriculum Advisory

New members will join in June.

- Policy

No updates

- SBRC

Updates already provided.

- Traffic Circulation (removed)

Communications (removed)

- Negotiations

No updates

- Parks & Recreation (removed)

Human Rights Committee

Ms. McCormick connected with Vicki Castagnola, liaison to HRC.

The following events are being planned:

- Annual Pride Day for June 1<sup>st</sup> 6:30 pm at Town Hall.
- Juneteenth Flag Raising Ceremony on June 19<sup>th</sup> from 9:30 to 11 am at Town Hall.
- Community Picnic for August.
- Collaborating with DPS staff on MLK event.
- Seeking new member from DHS student body for the committee.

Donations

None.

Review and Approval Vote of Previous Meeting Minutes

***Motion was made to approve the April 26, 2023 meeting minutes by a vote of 5-0. (Mr. Acosta was absent).***

Ms. Briggs thinks that in light of the increase in public statements at recent meetings, the Select Board members should have a discussion about a protocol for minutes at the retreat this summer to talk about how to optimize the minutes of the meetings.

Mr. Polito asked about approval of Executive Session minutes. The group pointed out that this topic was discussed at a recent Executive Session meeting and the group had agreed that counsel should review the minutes before approval.

Old/New Business

- Ms. Briggs said Mass. Association of School Committees (MASC) put out a communication about cuts in funding to low income and disabled students. Title 1 funding will also be reduced.
- Ms. Briggs stressed the importance of communicating budget needs to the greater community. She suggested that the School budget should be printed like the Town budget. Mr. Polito reported that they plan to start the budget process earlier this year to be proactive.
- Ms. Briggs said at Town Meeting people questioned class sizes and she suggested that the community be kept abreast of how changes will affect class size.

#### Acknowledgements and Announcements

- Mr. Polito acknowledged the accomplishments of the Track Team.
- SpongeBob musical was a successful event. All the students were engaged in the event.

#### Executive Session – Exemption 3 – To Discuss Strategy related to collective bargaining or litigation

***Motion was made to move to Executive Session and not return to public meeting. Motion was approved by a roll call vote of 5-0. (Mr. Acosta was absent).***

*Submitted by*

*Virginia Quinn*

*Recording Secretary*