

DEDHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS
School Committee Meeting
October 4, 2023

MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE:

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

MEMBERS OF THE ADMINISTRATION:

Nan Murphy, Superintendent
Dr. Ian Kelly, Deputy Superintendent (absent)
Dr. Sara Stetson, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services
Matthew Wells, Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations
Dr. Heather Smith, Director of Teaching and Learning

Meeting held at Oakdale Elementary School at 7 pm.

Pledge of Allegiance

Open Meeting (Public Meeting is recorded and can be accessed via Dedham Television)

Ms. Briggs chaired the meeting in place of the absent Mr. Hebert.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Edward Dockham, 75 Westchester Circle, said he would like to see the public comments protocol adopted at the Select Board be adopted by the School Committee. He said he hoped the suggestions he made about the Superintendent Update at the last School Committee Meeting will be addressed. He wants to know which grades are affected by the arrival of the new international students and the current Student/Teacher ratio, and how many ELL teachers have been hired. He also said he would like to know the financial costs incurred by these new students other than salary costs. Mr. Dockham also hopes that updates from SBRC are included at tonight's meeting.

Joshua Langmead, 12 Border St. inquired about the plans for Greenlodge building and the field at the new Greenlodge/Oakdale project. He said he performed his own informal survey by reaching out to neighbors and that most people agreed 5 to 1 that there needs to be a field project attached to the new building. He said there is also high interest about what happens to Greenlodge because the future of Greenlodge affects the new school location and design. He would like to see a group of people convened from the School Committee and Parks and Rec to discuss the revamping of the Greenlodge field.

Superintendent Update

Supt. Murphy said her focus this year will be incorporating opportunities for parents into many existing activities/events and creating new opportunities for them as well. This month there will be a number of parent-oriented events at different venues. There will be Open Houses in all K-12 grades and student and parent interaction in the lower grades at the Open Houses. On November 16th there will be a District Curriculum Night expressly for parents. Parents will be able to rotate around the schools and learn subjects of personal interest. There will also be informational meetings about college application processes. The Superintendent also talked about an Exchange Program with students from Spain. Students from Spain will be hosted by Dedham families for a week visit. And in April, some of our students will have a reciprocal experience in Spain. Students will attend the School Committee meeting in November to talk about their experiences hosting Spanish students.

She showed some photos of teachers and students activities from the first few weeks of school. She is impressed about the food services offerings that provide nutrition to our kids.

Supt. Murphy agreed to add updates about management and operations in the schools, at the request of Mr. Polito.

Dr. Flynn Gallant asked about Professional Development Day and whether feedback on the new programs and activities is being fathered from the teachers who attended. Supt. Murphy said they supply teachers with an exit ticket when they attend training to provide feedback.

Education Reports

ALICE Safety Training – Superintendent Nan Murphy

Supt. Murphy showed slides about ALICE Safety training. She said the focus of ALICE is finding ways to continually refine services to ensure safety. ALICE stands for Alert—Lockdown--Inform—Counter—Evacuate. Teachers, administrators, staff and students are learning how to identify and react to dangerous situations in a developmentally appropriate way. The primary goal of ALICE is to minimize anxiety in students.

ALICE training for the administration was held in August, Training for educators and staff were held in September/October. Supt. Murphy said they will host a community forum on October 26th and a district-wide communication will be held with students on October 17th at the classroom level with no drills involved. November will be the first practice drill with students.

Ms. McCormick asked about the educators and staff feedback on the training. Supt. Murphy said there were two training sessions. The first training about ALICE involved mostly discussions and the second training was more grounded in practical responses using role playing in response to specific scenarios.

Ms. Twomey asked about the timing of the informational sessions for parents and students about ALICE. Parents are getting information on the 25th and students are getting the information on the 17th. Will parents be informed about when the students will be learning about the process? Supt. Murphy responded that parents will receive information about the student training beforehand.

Dr. Flynn Gallant wanted to know if counselors would be on hand for any trauma the training has caused? Supt. Murphy said she would talk to leadership about having guidance on hand for that first training.

Mr. Polito asked who initiated the ALICE training? Supt. Murphy said she initiated the idea and she has reached out to the police and they are on board to support the program. Mr. Polito reiterated the importance of students being able to talk about what they have learned with their parents. Supt. Murphy assured the School Committee that this is a very thoughtful format that has been tested and validated and the role of families has been taken into consideration in a very serious way.

Mr. Acosta said it's so important for students to understand the severity of the dangers brought on by intruder events. Supt. Murphy said different age-appropriate life skills will be imparted to the students that will be useful both in- and outside of the school environment.

Status of Early Screenings and Communication – Dr. Heather Smith

Dr. Smith talked about Early Literacy Screenings. She said that new dyslexia legislation mandated new screening tests. They decided to go with mCLASS assessment which is similar to the DIBELS assessment previously used. DOE requires that schools screen twice per year and the school is required to supply interventions to students identified by the assessments. She talked about how they will notify parents in Grade 1-5 in the fall. If a student scores below benchmark, a letter will go out to families. The first letter would go to all the families of participating students on October 20th. And then a separate letter would go out for students performing below benchmark. Each letter will show detailed performance outcomes and families will be able to have input on the interventions. There is also after school support through tutoring. District Curriculum Night will include the new reports on literacy. Teachers have already been trained on the new assessments and the first assessments will be administered in the next two weeks. Target date for starting the new literacy intervention is November 6th.

Mr. Polito asked about the possibility that any students could be missed who need help? Dr. Smith said she is hopeful that the new MClass algorithm will help Interventionists catch the majority of students who need help, but she said that Dedham will also be adding other assessments and the frequency of the assessments will ensure accuracy of identification. Mr. Polito also asked about the costs associated with the after-school support for literacy? Dr. Smith confirmed to Mr. Polito that there are no extra costs associated with the after-school programs. The State is providing support at no extra cost through a grant applied for by Dedham schools. This is a one-year grant and they hope the grant will extend to next year.

Ms. McCormick applauded the district on the enhancement made to family communication. She also asked the length of time each literacy assessment takes. Dr. Smith replied that the initial mCLASS assessments have been easy to perform, but the extra assessments may need more teacher involvement. Most assessments only take a few minutes and are done by students with one-on-one teacher monitoring. Different grades have different assessments. Dr. Smith talked about the structure and process for the new screenings and how she hopes it will evolve.

Ms. Briggs commented on the success of grants in the district. It's great to have the grants for unfunded mandates required this year.

Business Report

Discussion & Vote of Seasonal Enrichment Program Fees

Mr. Wells reported that they need a vote to increase fees for Enrichment Programs. The fees will increase from \$65 to \$70. He listed the 15 enrichment programs that would be supported by these fees.

Mr. Acosta asked if the \$70 will maintain the self-sufficiency of the enrichment programs? Mr. Wells replied that the increase to fee will continue to provide the ability for the program to remain self-sufficient and he said there will be funding provided to students with financial needs.

Motion was made to accept the new enrichment fee of \$70. Motion was approved by a vote of 6-0. (Mr. Hebert was absent from meeting.)

Subcommittees Updates

- Budget

Mr. Polito said the first budget meeting of the year was held tonight. He will have more information next week. He said the budget calendar is in the first draft. It should be sent out next week. The group discussed the issue of Bylaw changes. Polito said he would look further into this. He said this may also be an issue to bring up at the Summit.

- Communications

No updates.

- Curriculum Advisory

No updates.

- Facilities

Mr. Acosta said they will be scheduling a meeting of the new Facilities Subcommittee soon.

- Financial Policy Review

Dr. Flynn Gallant said that members of the Financial Policy Review committee are reviewing Dedham's financial policies. They are currently working with the Town's Director of Finances on this project.

- Parks & Recreation

No updates

- Policy

Ms. McCormick said the Policy Subcommittee met about the physical restraint policy and Dr. Kelly is updating the policies based on their review. They voted to bring the updated policy to the next School Committee meeting. Definitions and functions of the subcommittees were also reviewed. Mr. Polito asked about the Public Comments review. Ms. McCormick said there was an extensive review done last year.

Ms. Briggs asked the Policy Subcommittee to review the Executive Session minutes policy.

- SBRC

Mr. Acosta said the last working group meeting was September 27th and a full update is available online. Issues discussed were: MSBA process, a design update (moving gym), and traffic study. MSBA Facilities Assessment Subcommittee and MSBA was pleased with the location and enrollment numbers. The updated project design includes moving the gym to the Cedar St. side to enable the use of the gym for larger community events. No final decision was made about the new design plan. If the decision is made to demolish the old building, the construction costs for the field will be considered in the reimbursable amount as long as it is contiguous to the property. Traffic site study will be done over the next few weeks and involves eight intersections. Mr. Acosta reported that application acceptances closed yesterday for the Ex-officio members. They are hoping to get one or two educators from Greenlodge and Oakdale to be added to the committee. He said there will be a public Zoom meeting on Friday where the subcommittee will discuss applicants. Dr. Flynn Gallant asked whether Greenlodge would stay open. Mr. Acosta said he would get back to them next week about that issue.

Ms. Briggs said a meeting for abutters is scheduled for October 18th at 6:30 on Zoom, but it may be rescheduled due to our School Committee meeting at 7 pm.

Donations

No donations.

Review and Approval Vote of Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion was made to approve the minutes from the September 5, 2023 Retreat, September 6, 2023 and September 23, 2023 meetings with amendments to administrative titles for three administrators. Motion was approved by a vote of 6-0. (Mr. Hebert was absent).

Old/New Business

Mr. Polito said that there have been questions raised at the SBRC and Fin Comm meetings about the process for redistricting. Supt. Murphy replied that they are currently working on three different redistricting plans that they will be bringing to SBRC.

Ms. Briggs reminded the group that it is not possible to undertake redistricting now for a school that won't open for three years.

Dr. Flynn Gallant said she would still like the School Committee to be able to talk about the process of redistricting. Mr. Polito asked how it was done before? Ms. Briggs said the Greenlodge/Oakdale project involves a new process that is under the purview of Vertex. Mr. Polito and Dr. Gallant reiterated the importance of open communication about the redistricting process. Supt. Murphy agreed to include communications about redistricting in the near future at both School Committee meetings and with informational meetings with families.

Mr. Polito asked about the status of the School Committee student representative and the Superintendent said she is working on the selection of the new representative.

Acknowledgements and Announcements

Ms. Briggs reminded everyone that the Summit at Dedham Middle School will be held on Oct. 17th

Mr. Acosta and Mr. Polito commented on the practice field dedication.

Mr. Acosta talked about the Safe Route to Schools Walking Bus that took place recently to help students get familiar with walking to school in a safe way.

Ms. Briggs talked about the practice field dedication. She thanked Amy Hicks for all the info she provided.

Executive Session – Exemption 3, to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining and litigation

Motion was made to leave public session and move to Executive Session. Motion was approved by a vote of 6-0. (Mr. Hebert was absent.)

Submitted by

Virginia Quinn

Recording Secretary