

DEDHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS
School Committee Meeting
November 1, 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
Dr. Sara Stetson, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services
Matthew Wells, Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations

Meeting held at Dedham Town Hall O'Brien Meeting Room 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

Susan Butler, followed up on her complaint at the last meeting about the conditions of the grounds at the high school. She reported that she is pleased that the grounds were finally cleaned up and they are now looking much better.

Student Representative Update

Naila Hernandez, the new student representative to the School Committee introduced herself and said that she is honored to be part of the committee and looks forward to providing a student perspective to future meetings as well as reporting on upcoming news and events in the district, especially at the high school.

Ms. Hernandez presented a compilation of past and upcoming events and programs in the district:

- Last week, all students, families, and faculty members completed surveys that were designed to provide our school with important feedback on the work of the school.

- Additionally, the science department visited the student lab at Novartis in Kendall Square, Cambridge. This was a school to career sponsored field trip for biotech students. Students learned important lab skills, competed in a micro-pipetting challenge, and spoke in small groups with five different scientists about their careers. The scientists had different specialties within the company including neuroscience, cardiovascular and cancer research. They also heard from a PhD student who is enrolled in their internship program.
- Last Wednesday, there was a Parent Forum on the ALICE Safety Training that took place at Dedham Middle school.
- On Sunday, the Dedham Public School 5th Grade Chorus visited the Providence Bruins.

Halloween at DPS

- Schools across the district have also been celebrating the Halloween spirit! The middle school hosted a Halloween dance last Friday. Riverdale had a spirit day, where students had the chance to wear the colors orange and black, in celebration of this holiday. The preschool program in the High School, DELTA, wore costumes and went trick or treating at the school, as candy was given out to them by students and teachers. There was also a Halloween parade that took place in both Riverdale and the ECEC. Students participated in decorating pumpkins and many other Halloween-based activities.

Upcoming programs and events

- The guidance department has offered internships within the district for highschoolers who are interested in teaching / early education.
- Dedham High School students have the opportunity to enroll in an internship in DELTA, our 4 year old preschool program within the School. I, myself, have the pleasure of working with the preschoolers for the first semester of my senior year. Upon completion of this half year elective, interns have the opportunity to consider their exploration in early education through internship placements at the ECEC and some of the Dedham elementary schools. This fall we have 11 interns in DELTA, 4 interns at the ECEC, 3 at Avery and 1 at Oakdale.
- Tomorrow, the Dedham High schoolers and Middle schoolers are also being asked to participate in a survey called the MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey. The questions on the survey cover many topics including alcohol, tobacco and other drug use; violence and safety; nutrition and physical activity; sexual behaviors; online behaviors; and mental health. This project will help our district develop and enhance its health education and prevention programs.

Dedham High School Performing Arts Company

- Under the direction of Dr. Chris Nadeau and Dr. Michael Medeiros, the Dedham High School Performing Arts Company will present their fall play, "Elsewhere" on Friday and Saturday, November 3 & 4 at 6:30 PM at the James Dunne Auditorium at DHS.

Parent Teacher Conferences

- Dedham High will also be hosting Parent Teacher Conferences on Tuesday, November 7, from 6-8 p.m. Parents will be sent a link on Tuesday that will allow them to sign up for conferences. Conferences are limited to five minutes per teacher.

Upcoming sports events

- On Monday, November 13th, DHS Best Buddies will challenge the Dedham Police Department in an exciting basketball game. Best Buddies is a fun club that strives to promote inclusion and build the much-needed connection between students with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- DHS is excited to announce that our football, field hockey, and both soccer teams are qualifying for the MIAA tournament! They will be hosting several games this weekend, beginning with football at 6pm on Friday.

Ms. Twomey said she is impressed by the breadth of Naila's presentation about activities and programs.

Ms. Briggs said the School Committee members are looking forward to Naila sharing her student perspective with them.

Superintendent Update

Supt. Murphy discussed parent engagement opportunities:

- ALICE Options Based Parent Forum
- Elementary Building Project PTO Forums
- Future Parent Forums

Monthly Parent Forums with the Superintendent will be held:

EVENING: Tuesday, November 14th 6:00 - 6:45

MORNING: Wednesday, November 15th 8:45 - 9:30

Supt. Murphy also talked about the state focus on a state-wide DESE initiative to address chronic absenteeism. Chronic absenteeism has grown in Mass. schools since the onset of the pandemic and our district is currently developing a process to follow up on this initiative. She showed a table compiled by the state, denoting the number of absences for our district.

DHS graduation date is set for June 8, 2024. This date is earlier than usual because an audit showed that our students were exiting the school setting earlier than mandated.

COMMENTS on the Superintendent Update

Ms. Twomey asked about the metrics being used for documenting absenteeism. Supt. Murphy said their metrics don't include medical absences. The students they are focusing on are absent over 10% of the time.

Ms. McCormick asked if the district could follow up with the School Committee members on the effectiveness of the interventions that they put in place to reduce absenteeism rates.

Dr. Flynn Gallant asked how students responded to the ALICE safety training. Supt. Murphy said that the parents at the Forum expressed that the ALICE training was a positive experience for the younger students. The parents were appreciative of having the information in advance.

Supt. Murphy added that absenteeism statistics contribute to the formula used to create the rating for our schools. The Commissioner is considering changing the rating so it is weighted further by absenteeism numbers.

Ms. Briggs suggested that the Superintendent communicate the absenteeism impacts to parents at the PTO meetings.

Mr. Polito asked about the senior graduation date adjustment and how that will affect other schedules. Supt. Murphy said they haven't yet discussed the impact in detail yet. However, they have learned that if seniors fulfill all their obligations, seniors can be paid to work in the elementary schools.

Naila Hernandez said that the ALICE training was clear and it made her and other students feel safer.

Education Reports

Update on Foreign Exchange Students Visit to DHS by Department Chair Alison Guifarro, World Language Dept. Chair

Alison Guifarro provided the benefits of the Foreign Exchange program in Alicante, Spain.

- The new program is an emergent experience.
- The program is more affordable because students are living with native families.
- Families form a connection.
- This year exchange students:
 - Attended classes
 - Interpersonal groups were formed to interact and speak Spanish
 - DHS students taught their favorite activities to the exchange students
 - Students engaged in a debate about the Siesta
 - Students held a cultural luncheon that included cooking together and sharing recipes.

Three students came to the podium to talk about the richness of the experience as hosts to the Spanish students.

Ms. Guifarro said they are looking forward to the next experience when DHS students go to Spain in April.

COMMENTS about the Foreign Exchange Program

Ms. Briggs commented on the creativity reflected in the program.

Mr. Polito thanked the students' families for hosting the students.

Ms. McCormick commented on how the program created an intersection between language and culture.

Mr. Acosta commented on the interactive quality of the program and the benefits of this approach.

Dr. Flynn Gallant commented on the amount of activities that were packed into one week.

Ms. Twomey congratulated the department for understanding how to impart language through culture.

Business Report

Introduction of New Facilities Director Matthew Haffner

Supt. Murphy commended Matt Wells for his hire of the Facilities Director and expressed her appreciation of the strengths and broad spectrum of knowledge that Matt Haffner brings to the Facilities Director position.

Matt Wells introduced Matt Haffner and commented about the strength of his experience and expertise. Matt Haffner talked about his experience thus far and how appreciative he is of the staff. He discussed that his immediate goal is to prioritize projects. He said that currently, Dedham is short-staffed in the schools and on the Town side. He feels that safety is an important goal and that safety needs to be combined with training in order to create efficiency. He talked about the need to adopt a more proactive, preventative maintenance approach in our budgeting. The shift to a more proactive budget will save money in the long run, but may require front loading the budget in the initial years.

He provided a summary of his current projects:

- Middle School windows. This project is underway but affected by supply line slowdowns.
- Major work on the High School boilers has been completed.
- Enhancement to vendor oversight is ongoing.
- Undergoing review of compliance in all buildings.
- Working with the SBRC on the design of the new Greenlodge/Oakdale school.

The focus on safety and training has created a backlog of requests, but he feels that the day-to-day function of the schools has already seen improvements.

COMMENTS on Facilities Director presentation

Mr. Polito appreciates the focus on safety for the workers and students.

Ms. Twomey appreciates the focus on training. She feels that training is so important to attaining safety. She would appreciate Mr. Haffner sharing his insights on the Greenlodge/Oakdale project with the School Committee as the project continues. Mr. Haffner said he would like to see the new school designed to be as user friendly and efficient as possible.

Ms. McCormick asked about the staff vacancies. Mr. Haffner said they are looking to restructure the custodial positions. At present, the district needs to hire a plumber, HVAC specialist and two custodians and other custodians are out on injury.

Mr. Acosta talked about the new Facilities Subcommittee and Mr. Haffner said that one of his goals is to complete a facilities operations report that incorporates one set of guidelines for both the Town and district. 2013 is the last time a conditions report was completed for all buildings.

Quarterly Budget Update

Mr. Wells reported that unexpected costs and enrollment increases at Greenlodge and ECEC are currently contributing to a \$329,000 budget overage. He said they are still waiting for a database from the state to be released that will determine the schedule of funding from the state for the additional international students.

Mr. Polito asked about the budget increases. Mr. Wells said there will be opportunities to cover the deficit.

Mr. Polito asked about the number of unfilled positions. Mr. Wells said they still have open positions for the paraprofessionals. There are many substitute teacher openings as well. He said there could be savings on the energy budget if the winter is similar to last year.

Mr. Acosta asked about a supplemental grant from DESE for \$25K. Mr. Wells said the new DESE grant program accounts have not been set up yet due to a new DESE grants system. More approvals are required and it details the process. Expenditures still have to be processed but the budget does not show that funding yet.

Discussion and Possible Vote on FY25 Capital Budget

Supt. Murphy displayed slides on the capital budget. \$2.4M budget is being requested for FY25 capital needs.

Ms. Briggs said the budget may need to be looked at more carefully and further discussion may have to be tabled to the next meeting.

Supt. Murphy noted that a lot of these items are reactionary items. Technology is part of the capital budget. The Technology Director is using a survey to help inform the purchases based on what teachers need.

She showed slides to illustrate the conditions that facilitated the capital request and detailed the estimated costs:

- \$1M for repairs to the DHS roof. Water is dripping from the roof above the gym.
- \$50K for repairs and painting to the exterior of DHS for one side of the building.
- \$25K for Exterior and Interior Painting and Ceiling Repairs.
- \$77K for plumbing repairs and upgrades across the district.
- \$25K for upgrade to the Therapeutic Training room for athletes.
- \$100K for weatherization of windows.

COMMENTS on the capital budget

Mr. Acosta wanted to know timelines for the capital budget.

Mr. Polito said the deadline for FinCom is for late December/January. He said last year FinCom reduced the request by over \$400K. Mr. Acosta said the School Committee needs to advocate for our capital budget request before Town Meeting.. He feels we need to ensure that the reasons for the budget requests are made clear to the community.

Mr. Wells said that deferment of work escalates the severity and cost of the project later on.

Ms. Twomey said that if three years from now, we don't get money for repairs, then the amount we are requesting will be even higher. The focus on safety should include the roof. She said we need to determine when it will be unsafe.

Mr. Wells said that safety issues are undertaken in partnership with the Town. Supt. Murphy said there are classes and bathrooms that have been closed due to safety and they are finally getting repaired. The next big storm could force them to close the DHS gym.

Ms. McCormick said these budgets are on the low end of what is really needed. She appreciates the photos that were displayed to illustrate the safety issues.

Dr. Flynn Gallant feels that our teachers and students deserve better. These issues illustrate the importance of developing a proactive budget.

Continued Discussion of Solar Panel Project

Dr. Kelly asked if there were any questions about the solar project since his presentation especially related to the Article 15 that will be debated at Town Meeting.

Mr. Acosta asked if we wanted to endorse the article. Dr. Kelly said that last year's vote to support and endorse the Solect Energy Letter of Agreement is an endorsement of the Warrant language.

Subcommittees Updates

- Budget

No further info.

- Curriculum Advisory

No updates.

- Facilities

Mr. Acosta reported that the first organizational meeting was held. They are scheduling more meetings and tours.

- Financial Policy Review

Next meeting is November 8, 2023.

- Negotiations

No updates.

- Parks & Recreation

No meeting yet.

- Policy - Second Reading of changes to Policy JKAA – Physical Restraint of Students

Ms. McCormick said they voted to bring the new JKAA policy to the full committee. The School Committee can vote after the third reading of the new policy. Policy is posted for the School Committee to review.

- SBRC

Mr. Acosta summarized the last meeting:

- Town officials reported on the financial and tax implications for the new school project.
- More details on the design were developed.
- November 7, 2023 meeting will focus on field space. They have reached out to Parks and Rec to collaborate.
- Traffic study is ongoing.

Donations

Mr. Wells reported that The Paper Store ran a promotion for the opening of their new store where a portion of their sales went to the schools. They are donating \$3,622.70 to the schools.

Motion was made to accept \$3,622.70 from The Paper Store. Motion was approved by a vote of 6-0. (Mr. Hebert was absent from this meeting).

Review and Approval Vote of Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion was made to approve the minutes from the October 18, 2023 meeting and approved by a vote of 4-0. (Ms. McCormick and Mr. Acosta abstained from the vote because of their absence during the October 18 meeting. Mr. Hebert was absent from this meeting.)

Old/New Business

Mr. Polito asked about preschool spots in light of the additional increase in kindergarten enrollment. Dr. Stetson said the prospect of increasing kindergarten numbers would not reduce the spots at the pre-school. Mr. Polito said he knows the ECEC has Pods for extending space. Mr. Wells confirmed that the ECEC has been built to accept modular additions for enrollment increases. He said he can't estimate the costs for that project but he knows he would like to make this a long term investment and prefers to get high quality materials.

Mr. Polito asked about the elementary enrichment programs. Dr. Kelly replied that the Principals are currently responsible for the management of the enrichment programs in their individual schools. Alyssa Freda has plans to standardize and centralize the after-school enrichment program, but at this time, her priority is on before- and after-school care.

Acknowledgements and Announcements

None.

Motion was made to adjourn and approved by a vote of 6-0. (Mr. Hebert was absent from this meeting).

Submitted by

Virginia Quinn

Recording Secretary