

Dedham Public Schools  
School Committee Meeting  
December 6, 2023

MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE:

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

Naila Hernandez (Student Representative)

MEMBERS OF THE ADMINISTRATION:

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

Meeting held at the Town Hall at 7 pm.

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

Mr. Hebert called the meeting to order.

Pledge of Allegiance

PUBLIC COMMENT

[NONE.]

Student Representative Update

Naila Hernandez presented the student representative update.

The weekly school summary for the High school:

- Ms. Laura Tucci had a mental health professional visit several psychology classes to discuss career pathways and career opportunities associated with the mental health field.
- DHS had 9 music students attend the Massachusetts Music Educators Association's Eastern District Festival Auditions. Each auditioning student received feedback on their note accuracy, technique, performance skills, music reading skills, and scales.
- HS senior, Jared Sedlis, recently qualified for a spot in the U.S. Junior Figure Skating Nationals with his fourth-place finish at the Eastern Sectionals. The competition took place from November 8-12th in Florida.

The district summary:

- Kindness Spirit Week took place at Avery. This was great for students as it showed them several ways kindness can be shown, with a different theme for each day.
- DMS 6th Grade Health students worked on a Supervillain Project to demonstrate their learning about the dangers of smoking and vaping. They listed the health benefits of not smoking/vaping, and provided background facts of information about smoking cigarettes or vaping electronic cigarettes. The classes had an "art gallery viewing" of all the posters and a share session on what they learned from the posters.
- Riverdale hosted their annual Turkey Trot. Families were welcomed to walk/jog with students and cheer them on as they completed laps around Riverdale before they were dismissed for Thanksgiving break.

Upcoming events at the High School:

- DHS will be having Auditions for the "Mean Girls" spring musical on December 18th & 19th.
- The Wellness Department has started its Break Free from Depression Unit with the Wellness 1 classes. The unit covers topics such as depression, anxiety, and suicide. It will correlate with the delivery of the new Mental Health Screening Tool, which has been coordinated with the school's psychologists to ensure that mental health professionals are available for the students if they need to speak with someone. The Unit started on Monday, November 27th and will end this Friday.
- Winter Sports games will begin this week.

Upcoming news for the District:

- All schools across Dedham are holding winter concerts this year.
  - December 15<sup>th</sup> – Avery Winter Concert
  - December 18 - High School Winter Concert
  - December 19 - Riverdale Winter Concert
  - December 21 - Oakdale Winter Concert
  - December 22 - ECEC Holiday Sing Along (Students and Staff only)
  - January 19 - Greenlodge Winter Concert
- The Student Council at Riverdale is collecting coats for the program, Coats for Kids. Donations are being accepted through December 22nd and the donation box will be located right outside the library. Although the program is called Coats for Kids, coats for adults are also accepted. The Student Council has been collecting coats for many years and the Riverdale community has helped many children and adults stay warm in the winter.

Mr. Hebert asked Naila if there was anything done at the high school to celebrate Jared Sedlis's selection for the U.S. Junior Figure Skating Nationals. She said she didn't know of any event being held for him.

Superintendent Update

- Eighth grader Maddie Lenane’s artwork was selected from over 200 submissions for the mural at DESE’s new office in Everett.
- The First Annual Curriculum Night was a huge success. It was a well attended event with many informative tables and sessions.
- Avery PTO will be holding a community shopping event with gently used clothing, books and toys on 12/9/2023.
- The district currently has an open posting for a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Liaison.
- Professional Learning update was provided for elementary, middle and high schools.

Ms. McCormick praised the marketing for Curriculum Night. She said that parents continue to talk about the night.

Ms. McCormick asked about how soon Supt. Murphy thought the diversity position would be filled. Supt. Murphy replied that she didn’t think the position would be filled before the end of the 2023-24 school year. They talked about how teachers are introducing equity and inclusion into the classrooms.

Dr. Flynn Gallant talked about the Diversity Inclusion Liaison being curricular and not extracurricular. The person in that role will need to connect with other groups doing diversity work in the community.

Mr. Polito requested more detailed information about the new liaison position. Supt. Murphy said that the new position requires a social work background because they are hoping that the liaison would help create a culture of support. The previous job description focused on adult learning. The new role would be someone who has experience working with children. Mr. Polito wanted to know if this is a temporary or permanent position. Supt. Murphy said they will be using the international student funding to support the new position for the next few years. Supt. Murphy said funding will be disbursed in January for two quarters.

Mr. Hebert commented on the Curriculum Night. He said he went to three different sessions and he feels he has a better understanding of the enrichment curriculum.

Ms. Briggs said that maybe next year they could get Dedham Cable involved with Curriculum Night so that parents who aren’t able to come, could watch it later.

Dr. Kelly said Curriculum Night was a direct result of School Committee policy role changes that were made as a direct result of community feedback.

### Education Reports

#### Acceptance Vote of Dedham Education Foundation Grants – DEF Representatives & DPS

The DEF Treasurer came to the podium to talk about the Fall enrichment grants submitted by Dedham educators.

The DEF grants committee votes on the grant submissions. This year they voted to fund 120 grants for the amount of \$30K for a variety of arts and music activities.

The district Visual Arts Director for pre-K to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade discussed in detail the visual arts grants received from DEF. She is pleased that many of the grants foster collaborations with community organizations.

The next fundraiser for DEF grants will be held on March 16.

Ms. Briggs applauded the efforts and work of the DEF and thanked them for working hard to raise money for the important projects they fund.

Mr. Hebert said we are lucky to have a partner to advocate for enrichment activities in the district.

***Motion was made to accept the DEF donation of \$29,768.75. Motion was approved by a vote of 6-0. (Ms. Twomey was not present at this meeting).***

#### Educator Recipients

#### Fall Athletics Update – Athletic Director Stephen Traister

Mr. Traister provided the 2023 Fall Athletics review. There was an increase in participation this year from the last few years. He showed the win-loss statistics for the varsity teams.

Some of the highlights from the Fall season were:

- Boys soccer team won back-to-back TVL league titles.
- Four Teams competed in the MIAA Soccer Tournament.
- Sponsored health awareness seminars.
- The new field has made a huge difference. High quality field.
- Winter athletics just started and participation looks good.
- The increase to users' fees has been very helpful to the success of athletics programs.

Mr. Polito asked if there is a way to track the operational budget. Mr. Traister said he could get the information.

Ms. McCormick said the participation numbers are impressive.

#### NESDEC Enrollment Projections and Findings – Superintendent Nan Murphy

- Supt. Murphy presented slides with data about enrollment projections:
- Grades K-12 enrollment data from NESDEC from 2013 to 2023.
- Historical percentage changes. Data showed a positive 5%+ enrollment increase in 2023-24.
- Projection enrollment. Showed expected static changes for 2023-34.
- Historical vs. projected enrollment by year and grade combinations.
- Projected a 20 student class size For Oakdale/Greenlodge elementary school.

Dr. Flynn Gallant asked how the projections were done. Supt. Murphy said the statistics are based on birth rates in New England and other trends. The data does not reflect who is moving in and out of Dedham, but Supt. Murphy said she would like to initiate an exit interview process when people are leaving the district.

Dr. Flynn Gallant noted that the projections for 10 years out seem to be going back to similar enrollments as 2014-15.

Ms. Briggs said maybe they could get more info about actual trends by setting up a subcommittee or working group to work with realtors in Dedham to identify trends.

Mr. Polito noted that according to these statistics, there are 70 new families enrolled in the schools other than the international students who moved here.

The group talked about projected enrollment based on building capacity. ECEC enrollment is higher than the original enrollment that the building was designed for, but ECEC students are spread out on different days.

Dr. Kelly said there are 345 children enrolled at the ECEC. 250 of them are 5-day week kindergartners. The other 100 are there only 2-3 days per week depending on their program.

Mr. Acosta said the MSBA uses district-wide trends to arrive at numbers for enrollment decisions. He said ideal enrollment is not always based on capacity.

Supt. Murphy said she would get more information about how enrollment statistics are determined.

Mr. Hebert explained that there are many ways to increase capacity in the new buildings. He also added that in six to eight years the high school will have higher enrollment numbers and we need to make sure the high school is maintained in a safe way.

Ms. Briggs said she feels that having more educators working together in one building will foster communication and integrated work. She feels we need to ensure that Riverdale building is equipped to keep up with increased enrollments.

### Business Report

#### Preliminary Discussion of 2024-2025 School Calendar

Supt. Murphy displayed two drafts of the calendar. The last day is June 23. With 5 snow days the last day would be June 30. If the School Committee decides that Rosh Hashanah will be honored, then the last day of school would change.

Ms. McCormick asked if the calendar was open to the public and Supt. Murphy said the calendar has not been vetted by the public.

Dr. Kelly said the draft also includes December 23 as a full day of school.

Supt. Murphy said some districts have started before Labor Day so that students could be released earlier in June.

Mr. Acosta said because Labor Day is on September 2nd, the teachers can't start before Labor Day. Also Election Day is Sept. 3.

Supt. Murphy said it would be helpful if Professional Development days were held before school starts. The group said that Election Day on Sept. 3<sup>rd</sup> prohibits that from happening.

Ms. Briggs said that there have been a few times when staff have gone back to school before September 1<sup>st</sup>. She said if we want to have an inclusive calendar when Labor Day is early, scheduling Professional Development days on the August 29th and 30<sup>th</sup> is helpful. She said they have talked about having no religious days on the calendar. The paraprofessionals have Good Friday as a holiday in their contract, but it is not in the Unit A contract.

Ms. McCormick suggests that we just keep the state holidays for our only days off and not include Good Friday and Rosh Hashanah.

Mr. Acosta said that the Juneteenth holiday has also added another day off.

Dr. Kelly said the goal is to ensure that half days are spread across the calendar evenly.

Ms. Briggs noted that camps start before June 30<sup>th</sup>, whereas there is no camp at the end of August.

Ms. Briggs said Amy Hicks created a map of the districts who celebrate the Jewish holidays, 95% of them returned to school before Labor Day.

Ms. McCormick said that we have to include Good Friday if we include the Jewish holidays.

Mr. Hebert said that there will be continued discussion on the calendar before February.

Supt. Murphy said she would be willing to share the calendar with the public and she plans on adding it to the agenda at the Parent Forum in January.

### Subcommittees Updates

- Budget

Meeting about operations budget tomorrow.

- Communications

No updates.

- Curriculum Advisory

No updates.

- Facilities

Mr. Acosta reported the Facilities Subcommittee toured the Greenlodge building led by Matt Haffner. They are in the process of scheduling a public meeting to recap the tour. They will also be discussing adding a member to the community group being set up to discuss the repurposing of the Greenlodge building.

### Financial Policy Review

Dr. Flynn Gallant said there is a meeting next week.

- Negotiations

No update.

- Parks & Recreation

No updates

- Policy - Second Reading of changes to Policy IC/ICA – School Year Calendar

Ms. McCormick said they adopted the new policy on the High School graduation date change. She said with the final reading they are hoping to vote on the policy change.

- SBRC

Ms. Briggs said the SBRC Subcommittee met on Monday.

Some of the highlights were:

- Levi Architects talked about area size.
- Vertex reviewed how the MSBA appropriates funding by line item.
- Requests from the educators in the visioning sessions included increased kitchen space, a larger space for the gymnasium, and teacher storage space.
- Looking at ways to consolidate and create efficiency. Combined library and STEM.
- Continue to work on the traffic study with the outside consulting agency. Said there will be no changes to flow of traffic around the neighborhood.
- The soil at Oakdale needs remediation and that will cost another \$4M. Ms. Briggs said there have been soil problems at all other new building sites.
- Mr. Acosta said upcoming meetings are December 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> December 12<sup>th</sup> is a combined Select Board/School Committee meeting. There will be another SBRC meeting on Dec. 19<sup>th</sup>.

#### Review and Approval Vote of Previous Meeting Minutes

*Motion was made to approve the November 15, 2023 minutes. Motion was approved by a vote of 5-0. (Ms. McCormick abstained because she was not at the November 15th meeting. Ms. Twomey is absent at tonight's meeting).*

#### Old/New Business

Ms. Briggs asked that the facilities rental policy be reviewed.

Ms. McCormick announced that the Human Rights Committee met in November. There will be an upcoming MLK celebration in February that will involve students. An anti-semitism event was held at the Middle School.

#### Acknowledgements and Announcements

Mr. Acosta said the Dedham High Student Council was recognized for an award and he thought it would be good to invite them to the meeting to honor them.

***Motion was made to adjourn and approved by a vote of 6-0. (Ms. Twomey was absent at tonight's meeting).***

*Submitted by*

*Virginia Quinn*

*Recording Secretary*