

Dedham Public Schools
School Committee Meeting
December 20, 2023

MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE:

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

Naila Hernandez (Student Representative)

MEMBERS OF THE ADMINISTRATION:

Nan Murphy, Superintendent
Dr. Ian Kelly, Deputy Superintendent
Dr. Sara Stetson, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services

Meeting held at the Avery School at 6:30 pm.

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

Mr. Hebert called the meeting to order.

AGENDA:

Performance by DPS Fine Arts Students led by Fine Arts Department Chair Heather Kirby

The Dedham Marauder Band played a medley of the Grinch Who Stole Christmas arranged by Michael Story. Students from the DHS ACappella and Chorus sang Let It Snow.

School Committee members thanked the students and Ms. Kirby for the presentation. Supt. Murphy asked if the high school students could share their music with the elementary schools. Ms. Kirby replied that this year high school students did share their music and talents with the elementary and middle school.

Public Comment

Andrew Czazasty commented that he feels that town residents will oppose the merged Oakdale/Greenlodge schools. He thinks that if the project doesn't pass Town Meeting, there will be further delays. He feels that a stand alone school is the best option.

Nicole Homeier, Greenlodge St. strongly supports modern facilities, but she supports a stand alone Oakdale School. She requested updated enrollment projections from the MSBA. It would be a mistake to build a new building that is too small. She feels there still has to continue to be the commitment to class size. She would like to see the Dedham class and school size policy follow the same parameters as the Wellesley Public School district.

Student Representative Update

Naila Hernandez provided the student representative update:

DHS update:

- Students in Mrs. Ashley Mansfield's Career Planning class participated in mock interviews last week. Students prepared for interviews by creating a resume and practicing commonly asked questions with peers. They were interviewed by staff in a small group setting to help them prepare for a job interview or a college admissions interview in the future.
- DHS also hosted two great Performing Arts events! The high school's winter concert was on Monday and the Taylor Swift tribute concert was last week. Both events were a great success.
- The food service industry also sponsored a Gingerbread house contest, where each department got to work together to decorate a house. They were all displayed in the cafeteria where students got to vote on the most creative, best use of materials and the one that stands out the most.
- Last Friday, students in Connections and Acting 1 participated in a performance of the short play Little Red Riding Hood. The Connections students worked for months on their starring roles during their Music Connections class, practicing their speaking lines, songs, and dances. Their Acting 1 friends supported their work by filling out the cast as supporters, narrators, dancers, and backstage crew. The three Connections students were thrilled to share the performance with their parents, teachers, and friends from Best Buddies. Everyone grew as performers and came together as a team, and we are so proud of them.

District update:

- Greenlodge first graders learned about holidays that are celebrated around the world!
- ECEC kindergarten classes celebrated the first night of Hanukkah.
- 5th-graders at Avery sang at Legacy Place as a way to spread holiday cheer!
- Avery School focused on kindness. A discussion took place in their community meeting about the importance of kindness and even presented a challenge to the students by rewarding them when they are "caught being kind". They get a certificate of kindness and the act is announced to other students who were caught being kind on the announcements in the morning. This is a great way of encouraging kindness to students in different ways throughout the community.
- Winter Enrichment Program registration opened last Wednesday. More individual information about the enrichment opportunities can be found on the DPS website.

Upcoming News and Events:

- Schools across the district have been celebrating spirit week as a fun way of sending the students off to winter break!
- There are 3 more winter concerts to be hosted.
 - December 21 - Oakdale Winter Concert
 - December 22 - ECEC Holiday Sing Along
 - January 19 - Greenlodge Winter Concert

Special recognitions at the High School:

- Senior, Jack Roberts and Junior, Luca O'Connor have been accepted into UMass Lowell's 3rd Regional Juried High School Exhibition, which showcases some of the best high school art in the region. Their artwork was on display for a week and a closing reception and award ceremony was held on the UMASS Lowell campus to celebrate their accomplishments.
- Mason Piro, earned one of the top scores at the Southeastern Massachusetts Mathematics League Meet.

Naila also followed up on the Chair's question from the last meeting about the way the high school has celebrated Jared Sedlis' figure skating accomplishment. She reported that Principal Forrest recognized his success by highlighting the student in the Marauder Message.

Superintendent Update

- Supt. Murphy announced that DPS has been awarded grants equal to a half million dollars this month. Awards include: 1) \$27K from DESE to support the implementation of the new Mass. Individual Education Plan process; 2) \$350K was received by the Student Services and Health Department from Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital Mental Health and Substance Abuse to continue the mental health initiatives outlined in the District Strategic Plan, and; 3) \$256K was received as a matching grant from the state to support instructional materials (4th highest award in the state).
- Dr. Heather Smith is being recognized nationally by the Modern Language Association Convention. She received an appointment that is only held by seven others nationwide.
- Dr. Sara Stetson presented at the International Dyslexia Association of New England conference. She was invited to participate in an expert panel discussion. Dr. Stetson was interviewed by Boston Globe about her work with dyslexia.
- Supt. Murphy displayed images of all the holiday concerts that were held this month at the elementary, middle and high schools. She thanked the Allied Arts teams for bringing together the students in the large settings. Students supported each other and engaged well on stage.
- She showed images from the Gingerbread House contest. There were 30+ houses that were created for the competition from departments all across the district. Chris Polito asked if the School Committee could participate next year.
- The Central Office team canceled the Professional Development Day for today to allow teachers and staff to spend time with friends and family.

COMMENTS about the Superintendent Update

Mr. Polito asked about the ALT Program. Supt. Murphy said there is a January meeting scheduled to discuss the program.

Mr. Polito commented that having nationally recognized central staff is such an asset to Dedham Schools.

Ms. McCormick commented on the success of the grants.

Education/Business Reports

- Elementary School Building Project Update

This update is included in the SBRC update.

- Discussion & Vote on SBRC Recommendation

Mr. Polito recused himself from this discussion because of conflict of interest.

Ms. Briggs updated the group on the SBRC meeting. She said the SBRC voted to recommend that the School Committee request a formal reevaluation of the enrollment numbers.

Mr. Hebert said the School Committee needs to vote to formally request the reevaluation. He asked if anyone had questions about the process.

Ms. Twomey thinks we need to clarify to the public the meaning of the vote. The issue is that there are higher than anticipated enrollment numbers from NESDEC. Voting on a formal request puts the project on hold. That could increase the costs of the project, but it also gives the Town a chance to look back at the process in light of the new enrollment numbers.

Mr. Acosta said the original projection was enrollment of 550 students for the combined Greenlodge/Oakdale school. The new enrollment numbers show an increase of 65 students.

Ms. Briggs said that every year in October districts have to submit their enrollment numbers. NESDEC is only involved as part of the MSBA requirement.

Dr. Flynn Gallant said that time is important and she thinks it's an opportunity to bring the Town together to make sure the final decision is a sound one.

Motion was made to request that the Superintendent, the Chair and the Town Manager request a formal reevaluation of the enrollment members through the MSBA. Motion was approved by a vote of 6-0.

[Mr. Polito rejoined the committee.]

- Continued Discussion of 2024-2025 School Calendar

The discussion and vote on the 2023-25 School Calendar will be tabled to the next School Committee meeting to give central administration the time to make necessary updates.

Subcommittees Updates

- Budget

Mr. Polito said they are working diligently on the FY25 budget and after reviewing the FY24 budget they are projecting a deficit spend based on increased enrollments. He announced that the Budget Subcommittee will be presenting a quantified draft of the budget at the next meeting.

Ms. Briggs asked that the School Committee be provided updates about any meetings related to the budget.

- Communications

No updates.

- Curriculum Advisory

Ms. McCormick said the Curriculum Advisory Subcommittee met last night and reviewed the role of the subcommittee and discussed tangible action items. She said Dr. Smith talked about shifts in curriculum related to the pilot. Ms. Twomey added that they received highlights about the Curriculum Night and they are talking about having more focus groups this year. Dr. Smith will attend a School Committee meeting in February to report about the ongoing pilots.

- Facilities

Mr. Acosta said the Facilities Subcommittee had a well-attended meeting with many community members. He added that the Facilities Subcommittee wasn't created just for repurposing the Greenlodge School building. The subcommittee is also looking to tour other facilities with the goals of improving function. He applauded the skills of Matt Haffner, the new Facilities Director.

- Financial Policy Review

Last meeting was postponed.

- Negotiations

Meeting at the beginning of the year.

- Parks & Recreation

No updates.

- Policy – Third Reading & Vote of changes to Policy IC/ICA – School Year Calendar

Motion was made to approve the IC/ICA policy changes as presented to the school year calendar. Motion was approved by a vote of 7-0.

Ms. Briggs said there will be an upcoming Policy Subcommittee meeting to discuss the rental policy and review the general subcommittee policy.

Mr. Acosta said the subcommittee chairs may have to submit a description of each subcommittee policy for review. Ms. McCormick said that the subcommittee will also review the flag policy.

- SBRC

Already updated.

Donations

Dr. Langenhorst received a donation of \$5,937.50 from Dedham Institution of Savings Foundation in support of the DPS One-to One Initiative. The money will be used to purchase 250 new Chromebook cases with the new Dedham Savings logo for next year's 6th graders.

Members expressed appreciation for the strong role that the Dedham Institution of Savings has played in supporting students at every level of the district.

Motion was made to accept \$5,937.50 from Dedham Institution of Savings Foundation. Motion was approved by a vote of 7-0.

Review and Approval Vote of Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion was made to approve the December 6, 2023 minutes. Motion was approved by a vote of 6-0. (Ms. Twomey abstained because she was absent from that meeting).

Old/New Business

Dr. Flynn Gallant asked if the custodial staff could do some extra work to sanitize the schools during the holiday vacation. Supt. Murphy responded that there are plans for doing that work during the break.

Acknowledgements and Announcements

Mr. Polito announced that the Boosters Club produced sweat shirts and swag for the soccer team and subsidized costs so that families only have to pay a nominal amount.

Mr. Hebert urged everyone to stay safe and healthy and have a Happy Holiday.

Motion was made to adjourn and approved by a vote of 7-0.

Submitted by

Virginia Quinn

Recording Secretary