

Dedham Public Schools
School Committee Meeting
Dedham Town Hall – O’Brien Meeting Room
450 Washington Street, Dedham, MA 02026
January 3, 2024

MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE:

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

Naila Hernandez (Student Representative) (absent)

MEMBERS OF THE ADMINISTRATION:

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

Meeting held at the Town Hall at 7 pm.

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

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

Pledge of Allegiance

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

Student Representative Update

None.

Superintendent Update

- Superintendent Nan Murphy announced that she is continuing to collect feedback from other educators at the various schools in Dedham during the month of January. She is also offering a coffee hour for parents on January 10th in the morning from 9:15 to 10:15 am and a virtual forum from 5:45 to 6:45 pm. She said that the online Superintendent Forum is also a place for parents and educators to voice their opinions. She plans to set up a Student Forum that will give students the opportunity to have their voices heard.
- Representative McMurty and Senator Rush will be visiting with Supt. Murphy on January 11th to discuss potential advocacy and funding possibilities.

- Winter Professional Learning will focus on trauma-informed activities, curriculum mapping, ELA curriculum review, analyzing student writing, using data to drive instruction and planning for MCAS accommodations.

Ms. McCormick asked if Central Administration could collect feedback from teachers on the Professional Development Sessions. Supt. Murphy said she would talk to Drs. Kelly and Smith about conveying feedback to the School Committee.

Education Reports

- Science Innovation at Dedham Middle School – Amy Hill, Secondary Science Department Chair (Grades 6-12)

Amy Hill presented on the Science Program for Grades 6-12. She talked about phenomena-based science and how it focuses on using investigation about real world issues to solve problems. DESE is promoting this type of learning in science. The program focuses on critical thinking and reduces disparities in learning. Program began in 2021 and Dedham now has six units. She displayed the current units taught at DMS.

She showed slides with a list of courses using the phenomena-based instruction at Dedham High School (marine science, anatomy/physiology, biology and biotechnology). Chemistry and physics will soon be added to that list. The curriculum reinforces student driven exploration. DPS was one of the first districts to use this program. The program allows the district to stay ahead of the upcoming STEM MCAS changes for Grades 5, 8 and 10. The curriculum also allows the opportunity to involve families in the learning process because the instruction promotes conversation.

COMMENTS

Dr. Kelly commended Ms. Hill for promoting success through being proactive and for securing grants offered through Mass STEM Hub and the One8Foundation. Her work is an example of how Dedham educators have made Dedham a leader in teaching and learning in the state.

Ms. Twomey said she has an eighth grader and she feels that this curriculum has taught her storytelling. She said her daughter comes home from school and wants to talk about what she has learned. She feels it integrates STEM teaching into the rest of the curriculum. She would like to see data that shows outcomes of the program and how it affects what students choose to study in college. Ms. Hill replied that she is currently looking at the effect on students through electives and it's apparent that the new curriculum has stimulated them to study Science and Math.

Ms. Briggs said that critical thinking should be part of every curriculum. She asked about building partnerships for science related careers. Ms. Hill said the Career program at the High School is bringing in outside scientists to talk to students through Zoom. Ms. Briggs commented that it's important to expose students to potential career paths. Ms. Briggs suggested that the schools could even tap into talented parents to share their knowledge.

Ms. McCormick commented that she would like to see more data about how these programs are impacting student learning.

- High School Accreditation Process – James Forrest, High School Principal

Mr. Forrest reviewed the mission of the NE England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) in the accreditation process. NEASC promotes and assesses high quality education with a lens of equity.

Mr. Forrest discussed the key points of the accreditation process:

- The accreditation process is a 10 year cycle.
- Dedham High School was last accredited in 2013.
- Accreditation process is inclusive and involves parents.
- Accreditation comes with a structured framework with priorities.
- Process will be undertaken over the next 2 years.
- NEASC Steering Committee includes DHS educators.
- Self reflection committee is a volunteer group of DHS educators.
- Standards for school mission and curriculum are being developed.
- Professional Development sessions have been focused on the accreditation.
- Collaborative Conference will be held on March 24-25 with peer leaders from NEASC.
- Priorities delineated by NEASC will be worked on from Spring 2024 to May 2026.
- In May 2026 there will be a 3-day visit with final recommendations.

COMMENT

Mr. Acosta asked what were the findings from 2012 during the last accreditation process? Mr. Forrest said NEASC asked that the DMS curriculum be written and transparent. And facilities compliance issues especially concerning ADA are always part of the recommendations.

Mr. Forrest said the only time he heard of schools losing accreditation is due to inadequate facilities. The focus is on best practices and meeting student needs. Mr. Polito asked whether the teachers on the Steering Committee are being taken away from their usual responsibilities. Mr. Forrest assured him that the teacher's work is outside school time.

Ms. McCormick feels this is an opportunity to showcase our academic progress. Mr. Forrest thinks it's a good opportunity for teachers or staff to ask for help.

Supt. Murphy said she would like to see the school internalize some of the processes learned during the self reflection process especially regarding the portrait of a graduate.

• Discussion & Vote on Assistant Superintendent for Business & Finance Position

Supt. Murphy announced that tonight she is bringing forth a candidate for approval for the position of Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations. The Assistant Superintendent job is posted internally and externally. The interview team includes members from business, educators and Human Resources. Three candidates were interviewed and the Superintendent is recommending Dr. Ian Kelly for this new position. She said he has worked closely with the Business Department at the high school and has developed strong relationships there.

Mr. Hebert asked if anyone had any questions. Mr. Polito asked about Dr. Kelly's title. Supt. Murphy said he would maintain the Deputy Superintendent role in addition to the Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations title.

Ms. McCormick commented that Dr. Kelly has been fantastic in every role he has held in the district.

Ms. Twomey said they are lucky to have Dr. Kelly continue to grow his career in the district.

Motion was made to accept the Superintendent's recommendation to approve Dr. Kelly's change of title to Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations in addition to retention of his current title of Deputy Superintendent. Motion was approved by a roll call vote of 6-0. (Dr. Leah Flynn Gallant was absent from this meeting.)

Business Report

• 2nd Quarter Budget Report

Dr. Kelly presented a budget report that showed what has been expended to date and encumbrances as of the end of the 2nd Quarter. He reports that most lines are tracking as expected per school, however, we are about 40% through the school year and only 23% of the budget is remaining system-wide. That is setting up a projected deficit.

The main reasons for expected deficit is 7% enrollment increase (177 new students) from last year, an increase to van services, and unbudgeted out-of-district student services. We are projecting a \$1.2M overage system-wide and that affects the FY25 budget because they are recurring costs. Dr. Kelly said that the increased expenditure burdens may allow us to qualify for relief for the FY24 budget. Because of the projected overage, all non-essential spending has been halted temporarily.

COMMENTS

Mr. Polito announced that enrollment numbers are up by 175 students: 60 from international students, and the rest are from new families moving into Town.

Ms. Briggs talked about the transportation issue and what other districts are doing to circumvent the costs. She asked if DPS would be willing to privatize and/or share some of the transportation resources within Dedham. She feels that vendors are taking advantage of the limited drivers available and driving up prices for transportation. Dr. Kelly said he plans to set up meetings with the vendors while waiting for relief and/or trying to put in place new ideas.

• Discussion of LEAP/Summer programming Fees

Dr. Kelly showed a table that includes a 5% increase for Extended School Program (JumpStart, TREK, Avery Institute). JumpStart was not run last year because it was a very expensive program to run for 3-5 year olds. In Summer 2023 there was no more grant funding for the program and there was not enough interest due to cost increase and 5-week commitment. He said that JumpStart will be coming back online this summer with an option for weekly registration with a Monday-Thursday schedule.

Ms. Twomey asked if the curriculum will be geared to certain themes so parents can make decisions based on what is being offered and whether the structure of the program will be modified to accommodate part time participation in the program. Dr. Kelly said he would discuss these questions with Ms. Freda and provide more information to the School Committee.

Dr. Kelly said he would like a vote of support for the fee increases by the next School Committee meeting so the registration process can begin as soon as possible.

Ms. McCormick said she thinks the cost of the program is affordable compared to other programs and she would be willing to vote on it tonight so that registration could begin soon. Mr. Hebert said since it's not on the agenda, that a vote will not be taken tonight.

Mr. Polito asked if we have subsidized funding available for families that can't afford the extended program and Dr. Kelly replied that families can indicate financial need during the application process.

• Continued Discussion of 2024-2025 School Calendar

Supt. Murphy said they have narrowed down concrete discussion points regarding the calendar. She announced that she had a conversation with Union leaders and there is no interest in having the first day of school before September 1st.

She displayed the current iteration of the calendar, with two days of Professional Development before the start of school and all students in school by September 10th and 11th. For the 2024-25 calendar, since Yom Kippur is on a Saturday, she suggests that we will not recognize that holiday with a day off, but since Rosh Hashanah is on a weekday, we will recognize that holiday. She suggests that if both holidays are on a weekday in subsequent years, then the higher holiday, Yom Kippur will be recognized. Good Friday remains a holiday due to its inclusion in a number of union contracts. She said the difficult part about starting after Labor Day is that the last day of school will be June 23, and with five scheduled snow days, the last day will be June 30th.

Mr. Polito feels that if school is extended to the end of June, that a large percentage of students will not attend school. He talked about conducting a survey to ask what the faculty and staff prefer.

Mr. Acosta asked which bargaining units have Good Friday in their contracts? Supt. Murphy said Food Services, Paraprofessionals and Custodians have Good Friday in their contract. He asked if school could be held on Good Friday and the schools pay the salaries for staff that have that day off in their contract. If we could do that, he thinks Rosh Hashanah could also be removed as a day off.

Ms. McCormick said she thinks we need to discuss creative solutions and the only two flexible days are Good Friday and Rosh Hashanah.

Dr. Kelly said he would review the costs for paying the obligated employees for one day of work, but he thinks it would be close to \$45k. Dr. Kelly said we need to vote on this by the next meeting so parents can make plans.

Mr. Acosta asked about half days and Dr. Kelly said he has worked on those numbers and the elementary requirements do not allow any wiggle room.

Ms. McCormick said she would like to see Columbus Day officially referenced as Indigenous People's Day in the district.

Supt. Murphy asked if the School Committee could provide her a directive so that the next discussion could be more productive.

Ms. McCormick said it seems there is not a lot of flexibility with the calendar. She asked if ideas could be solicited from anyone at the school leadership level or the community. Supt. Murphy said she can pose questions to the families at her open forums about this issue and provide feedback to the School Committee.

Ms. Briggs asked about the date of High School graduation given the change in policy they put into effect at the last meeting and given the calendar possibilities discussed today. The group commented that graduation could be as late as June 18th.

Subcommittees Updates

- Budget

Mr. Polito said the FY25 budget should have a finalized draft by the end of next week.

- Communications

No updates.

- Curriculum Advisory

No updates.

- Facilities

No updates.

- Financial Policy Review

No updates.

- Negotiations

No updates.

- Parks & Recreation

No updates.

- Policy

Ms. McCormick said that the next Policy subcommittee meeting will be held on January 9th and they will be talking about facilities rental, subcommittee descriptions and flag policy.

- SBRC

Ms. Briggs said that the next SBRC Subcommittee meeting is January 22nd at 6:30 pm.

Review and Approval Vote of Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion was made to approve the December 20, 2023 meeting minutes as presented. Motion was approved by a vote of 6-0. (Dr. Leah Flynn Gallant was absent from this meeting.)

Old/New Business

Ms. Briggs reminded the group that the Community Forum on Solar project will be on January 8th. She also raised the question about the date of the School Committee winter Retreat. Supt. Murphy said she will reach out to Jim Harden to see when he is available. The group agreed that an optimal date for the Retreat would be January 31, 2023.

Supt. Murphy said the FinCom presentation is January 11, 2023 at 6:30 pm.

Mr. Polito asked who would take the place of Dr. Kelly in his former Curriculum related position. Supt. Murphy said they are discussing distributing some of his previous roles among existing staff and posting the position for Asst. Supt. of Teaching and Learning in February/early March for a July 1, 2024 start date.

Executive Session - Exemption 3, to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining

Motion was made to adjourn to Executive Session and not return to public session. Motion was approved by a vote of 6-0. (Dr. Leah Flynn Gallant was absent from this meeting.)

Submitted by

Virginia Quinn

Recording Secretary