

Dedham Public Schools
School Committee Meeting
Avery School
January 17, 2024

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 7 pm.

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

Mr. Hebert, Chair of the School Committee, called the meeting to order.

Pledge of Allegiance

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

Student Representative Update

Naila Hernandez, the student representative provided the weekly summary of events at DPS.

Dedham High School:

- Students in Art 1 and Graphic Design had the opportunity to meet with designer and MassArt instructor Tony Leone. The presentation focused on the creation of zines throughout history and how different artists approach the process. Students had the opportunity to ask questions and to see examples of zines created by MassArt students.
- Students in DNA Science and Biotechnology had the opportunity to speak with a cell biologist from Thermo Fisher Scientific over Zoom. During the discussion, she described her role in the development of gene therapy products for cancer treatment, and provided insight into the FDA approval process and the steps involved in introducing these therapeutics to the market. She

discussed her education, career path, future goals and answered many questions about her experiences working in the field of biotechnology.

- The DHS Concert Band and A Cappella Choir performed at the town's observance of MLK Day at DMS. Food and refreshments were provided by local businesses. This was a sponsored event by the Dedham Human Rights Commission.
- Last Wednesday, Mrs. Hardens Honors Physics class held a homemade boat race at the Dedham Pool. This was an in-school field trip for all students in honors physics. The students used their understanding of Archimedes' Principle and buoyancy to build boats solely out of cardboard and duct tape. The cardboard boats were paddled across the Dedham Pool by at least one person from each group in the quickest time.

District:

- Community members were invited to attend an informational forum on proposed plans for adding solar panel canopies over open parking areas at Dedham High School, Dedham Middle School, Avery Elementary School and the ECEC.
- Oakdale had an assembly presented by the Arts for Learning Massachusetts ensemble entitled "Become Your Dreams: History of Hip Hop". They also hosted a 5th Grade Student Council that led the school assembly honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. This assembly was an opportunity for the Oakdale community to reflect on the legacy of this great civil rights leader.

UPCOMING NEWS & EVENTS

- The Middle school's annual tradition continues! The Dedham Police Department is sponsoring a ski trip for DMS students to Gunstock Mountain Resort that will take place on the 21st of February.
- ECEC is having their Annual Winter Window Stroll this Friday, January 19th from 5:30-7:30pm where families can browse around the campus and view the beautifully created winter windows that classes will create!
- Freshman at the high school are invited to attend a Midyear Exam study session, Cocoa, Cookies, and Cram, tomorrow from 2:20-3:30 in the library. Teachers will be there to answer questions and run review sessions. Link Leaders will also be there to support them as they prepare for their first Midyear Exams! After the study sessions, they will have hot chocolate and cookies for them to enjoy.
- The National Honor Society is running a clothing drive connected to Catie's Closet in Hyde Park. Catie's Closet is an organization that helps local students in need meet their basic necessities of clothing items, toiletries, and shoes. The boxes for collection are placed in the main lobby from January 3rd until January 26th. Where all students and families are welcomed and encouraged to donate!
- DHS Performing Arts Company is presenting its Annual Family Concert/Sing Along featuring songs from Descendants on Saturday, January 27 at 10 am at the DHS Auditorium. Costumes are encouraged. Themed pictures and concessions will be available. Tickets are available online at or at the door. All proceeds benefit the Performing Arts Company.

Superintendent Update

Supt. Murphy presented this week's update that included:

- Announcement of two mid year retirements.

- Overview of students' performances at MLK celebrations.
- List of events that she attended and upcoming events on the agenda.

EDUCATION REPORT

DHS Senior Inter Project and Recipients – Asst. Principal Kelly Cook, DHS Students

Ms. Cook introduced Career Counselor, Ashley Mansfield and one of the student interns. Naila Hernandez, the student representative on the School Committee, is also participating as an intern.

Ms. Cook said the program is a pilot and the goal is to provide seven seniors with relevant, practical experience that can be transferred to the real world.

Ms. Mansfield talked about the application process. The 30-hour per week program takes the place of their last semester of school except for AP courses. She is currently reaching out to businesses to become partners in the program.

Ms. Twomey expressed her desire to hear follow-up at the end of the year about the program. Ms. Mansfield said the interns will be doing a year end presentation that can be attended by the public.

Continued Discussion of 2024-2025 School Calendar

Superintendent Murphy announced that she sent a poll to educators about the school calendar. The poll reflected that 52% of educators favored eliminating religious holidays and 9% showed no preference. A review of the contracts indicated that teachers who want to honor the holiday can do so with a 48-hour notice. She said that only a few union contracts prohibit working on religious holidays and those contracts would need modification if there was a decision to eliminate the holidays.

Dr. Kelly said that low attendance rates on those days could affect the day being counted as a full school day.

Ms. Briggs asked if we could have a half day on December 23rd. Dr. Kelly said we are tight on the days required by DESE at the elementary level. They talked about swapping half days and Professional days but Dr. Kelly said that would not count as a reduction.

Mr. Acosta asked about teachers starting the week before the start of school. Supt. Murphy said that in her conversations with unions this is not an option.

Supt. Murphy offered to send the same poll to families and staff and to extend the poll deadline for the educators.

BUSINESS REPORT

FY24 Expense Update

Dr. Kelly summarized the current issues with the operating budget and said the Out-of-District and transportation costs are causing a 100% overage on the budget. The unexpected 7% enrollment increase is also impacting the budget overage. He said that the state has authorized relief for schools that would equal about \$150K, but these funds are a cash advance on the circuit breaker reimbursement. They are also waiting on the 1st installment for the international students this month.

Mr. Polito reinforced that transportation costs are subject to market variability and cannot be controlled.

Presentation of FY25 Operating Budget

Mr. Hebert announced that Supt. Murphy and Dr. Kelly will present the report on the FY25 budget and then they will open the floor to public comment.

Supt. Murphy said her budget focus will be centered on the three strategic initiatives that were outlined in the 2020 District Strategic Plan: Invest in human capital (coaching professional development), create integrated networks for expected outcomes, and expand use of technology for performance improvement. The budget FY24 overage means that we will enter into the FY25 budget development with the need to carry \$2.3M recurring, unbudgeted costs. The Budget Subcommittee approved the administrations' recommendation of an 8.06% increase. This 8% increase still falls short of level services.

Dr. Kelly and Supt. Murphy presented slides about the budget details. Dr. Kelly gave a history of the cuts required for the FY24 budget. This year there are more students in placements and tuition rates for OSD services have increased markedly. Inflation also has to be taken into consideration.

Dr. Kelly said they are making every effort to limit cuts to goods and services and reduction in personnel. He showed a slide that showed that 70% of the required FTE are directly student facing positions and 3.5% are not. He noted that there are about 4 months between now and Town Meeting and a lot may change between now and then. They still do not have the details of positions that need to be cut.

Public Hearing for FY25 Operating Budget

Motion was made to close the public hearing and approved unanimously by a vote of 7-0.

Mr. Hebert said public comments would be heard first and then School Committee members will have the opportunity to comment. The School Committee voted unanimously to open the hearing.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

Motion was made to close public hearing and approved unanimously by a vote of 7-0

SCHOOL COMMITTEE COMMENTS

Ms. Briggs said the budget is affected by situations we don't have control over. She said the out of district placements and the transportation costs related to them are the mainstay of the deficit problem plus the increase in enrollments this year. She said it's important that we keep the conversations going on the subject.

Supt. Murphy said that the increase in enrollment is also exciting. She said most districts do not have enrollment increases. Supt. Murphy said only 64 of the 176 new students are international students.

Dr. Flynn Gallant said it's important to reflect the positive spin on the additional enrollments. We have to remember that we will get reimbursements for many of the international children. We need to deliver a service level budget and this current reiteration is 3% below that.

Ms. McCormick asked about how the level services decisions are being addressed? Supt. Murphy said she has made sure that the principals were brought into the process from the beginning.

Mr. Polito said it was a challenging year and he thanked the administration for their support. The budget is not level service, but we are not cutting expectations of our students' education.

Mr. Hebert said we will be voting the final draft of the budget at the January 31, 2024 meeting. We will probably be asked to reduce the budget further and we will be as thoughtful as possible during that process.

Mr. Acosta asked how additional enrollment increases would affect us in subsequent years? Dr. Kelly said that if we have another enrollment increase we don't anticipate then we would have to add staff back. Increasing class size is one of the options under our control.

Mr. Hebert noted that we know that enrollment always increases after the budget is finalized.

Continued Discussion & Vote on LEAP/Summer Programming Fees

Dr. Kelly updated the group on the LEAP Summer Programming fees. LEAP originally started as a 100% grant funded program and last year we could not run it at budget neutral because there was not enough interest to make it viable. Given the budget circumstances he does not recommend including that program in the budget. He showed a budget with the 5% increase in fees for the TREK and Avery Institute summer programs.

Dr. Kelly said the increases are based on inflation predictions.

Motion was made to approve the TREK Summer 2024 rate of \$475 for the program and Avery Institute for \$95 per week. Motion was approved by a vote of 7-0.

Discussion & Possible Vote of ECEC Before & After School Care Fees for 2024-2025

Dr. Kelly announced that rates for ECEC Before and After School Care have not been increased since he has been here for eight years. He would like to align them with the LEAP rates. He recommended a 25% increase in the Before and After School Care fees. He reported that last year only five families asked for financial support.

Ms. McCormick asked if the programs could have a phased-in fee increase. Dr. Kelly said the fee increases are directly related to the increases received by the educators.

Ms. Briggs said that in the future, we should let parents know that there will be annual incremental increases in the future.

The group discussed the enrollment process and timelines for registration for the programs and the communication used to convey the increased fees.

Mr. Hebert asked if the group felt that they could vote on this tonight. Ms. McCormick said she would like to get better projections of enrollment before she voted.

Mr. Acosta said he would like to wait to vote to get more analysis about how the rate and enrollments would affect the program for next year. Dr. Kelly said he would put together a more detailed breakdown for the group.

Mr. Hebert said they will table this until the next meeting.

Discussion of The Education Cooperative (TEC) Request for Capital Limit Increase

Dr. Kelly informed the group that this increases the capital reserve for TEC. The limit of the reserve account will increase from \$750K to \$3.5M. This does not give TEC the freedom to use the money, and if they have a surplus in their account, then they can transfer to the reserve account. Dr. Kelly said the increase to the reserve account does not require a unanimous vote, it can be approved as long as there is no dissenting voice..

No dissenting opinions were offered by the members.

Subcommittees Updates

- Budget

No further updates

- Communications

No update

- Curriculum Advisory

No update

- Facilities

Mr. Acosta said there was a good-sized turnout for the Solar Energy Forum. There will be another meeting on January 24th at the Middle School. Abutters have received flyers about the meeting.

- Financial Policy Review

Next meeting is January 29th. Negotiations

No updates.

- Parks & Recreation

No update

- Policy

Ms. McCormick said at the most recent meeting they discussed the community use of school facilities. They decided they needed to get more info about nearby communities and their policies before a decision is made. They talked about subcommittees and send emails to each chair so charges of each committee can be updated. They are at the information gathering stage on the flag policy.

SBRC

Ms. Briggs announced that the next SBRC meeting is Monday, January 22nd at 6:30 PM at Town Hall.

Donations

Dr. Kelly announced a donation from the Paper Store at Legacy Place from their fundraiser for \$537 to enrich the education of students in the district.

Motion was made to accept the donation in the amount of \$537 from the Paper Store at Legacy Place. Motion was approved by a vote of 7-0.

Review and Approval Vote of Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion was made to approve the minutes from the January 3, 2024 minutes with amendment as noted. Motion was approved by a vote of 6-0. (Dr. Flynn Gallant was absent from the meeting.)

Motion was made to approve the minutes from the December 12, 2023 joint meeting. Motion was approved by a vote of 5-0. (Ms. McCormick and Ms. Twomey were absent from the meeting.)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr. Acosta announced that Dedham Hockey is hosting a double header at Nobles on January 20th.

Mr. Hebert acknowledged the success of the Martin Luther King celebration at the High School.

Submitted by

Virginia Quinn

Recording Secretary