

Dedham Public Schools
School Committee Meeting
Avery School
March 20, 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, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations and 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)

Pledge of Allegiance

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

Performance from the cast of Mean Girls from the Dedham High School musical.

- Discussion, Recommendation and Vote on the Enrollment Option for the Elementary Building Project

Motion was made to take the agenda out of order. Motion was approved by a vote of 7-0.

[Chris Polito recused himself due to personal conflict of interest.]

Supt. Murphy showed slides with the school building project survey feedback. Survey was emailed to all DPS families, posted on social pages and in newspapers and flyers, and shared at all public forums held through in-person and Zoom. There were a total of 647 respondents who participated in the survey. Out of the 647 replies, 525 responded in favor of the stand alone Oakdale.

Supt. Murphy said that she and the leadership team are recommending the stand-alone Oakdale with 360 student enrollment and would provide 110 more students than the current enrollment at Oakdale, that would allow expansion.

Mr. Acosta said that this decision makes sense with the new enrollment numbers and he would hope we can all move forward and address the capital improvements to the remaining buildings that need updates.

Ms. Flynn-Gallant said that we need a clear plan to address issues with the remaining facilities as soon as possible.

Ms. Twomey thanked the survey respondents. She applauded the leadership team for supplying so many outlets for feedback. It was important to hear the community voices.

Ms. Briggs said the 360 enrollment option gives us a new opportunity to alleviate overcrowding in the new facility.

Motion was made by Ms. Briggs to accept the 360-student stand alone school for the new Oakdale Building project. Motion was approved by a vote of Vote 6-0. (Mr. Polito recused himself from the discussion and vote).

[Chris Polito rejoined the committee.]

PUBLIC COMMENT

Carlene Campbell-Hegarty, 57 Holmes Rd., feels that the Town made the best choice possible for the Oakdale Project. Mr. Hebert replied that SBRC will look at the site again and then there will be meetings with the MSBA. He said if we move forward smoothly with the process we should only be six months behind the original schedule.

Jim Maher, 22 Sherman Rd. thanked the group for making the right decision.

Andrew Czazasty, 118 Sprague St. thanked the School Committee and hopes the decision will reflect well on the committee.

Matt Brophy, Pleasant St. said this was a lesson learned to apply to the other schools going forward.

John Tocci, 78 Adams St., Chair of the SBRC, thanked the School Committee members for being a great partner. He also thanked the School Committee for listening to the community. He feels that every decision made was for the best interest of the educators and students.

Student Representative Update

Naila Hernandez provided the bi-weekly update at DPS.

High School events:

- The English for EL classes got a special visit last month! They explored the award-winning book *The Only Road*, which is about a young Guatemalan boy's journey to the US. Students participated in a virtual visit with the author, Alexandra Diaz. Students took the lead in a thoughtful discussion about the book. Many thanks to the Dedham Education Foundation for making this event possible!
- The performance of *Mean Girls* was a huge success! After two months of rehearsal, the cast and crew outdid themselves. The audience was blown away and couldn't stop talking about how amazing and fantastic the show was. Much gratitude to Ms. Soson, Ms. Kirby, and everyone involved in the production for the amazing performances.

- On Thursday, March 7, the junior class participated in an important training, sponsored by the Norfolk County District Attorney's Office. This one-hour session, led by local first responders and public health partners, taught students what to do during an emergency. This training was one of the various challenges of Team Rival, a community service and peer leadership-based project that the Student Council participated in.

District Summary:

- At Oakdale, last Wednesday, the third graders attended a field trip to The Commonwealth Museum. They reviewed state history beginning in the 1600's and learned about the Native Americans, the Pilgrims, and Puritans. They explored the American Revolution and continued traveling through time where they ended up learning about the Lowell Mills. They also learned about child labor, the history of children working in the mills, and the right to an education.
- Congratulations to the middle school's 7th and 8th grade students, Celia , Izzy, Sasha, Adlai, Dershana, and Jorge. These students participated in the MMEA Eastern Junior Districts Festival this past weekend. After securing their spots in January, over a day and a half they rehearsed with their respective ensembles which culminated in a performance Saturday afternoon. During rehearsals, students worked with respected conductors based in New England.

UPCOMING NEWS & EVENTS

- Schools across the town are excited to announce that the award-winning author Rajani LaRocca will be visiting the Dedham students on April 12, 29, and 30th. Rajani will be offering presentations to students focused on her author journey and published books.
- Oakdale will be hosting a cultural night on Thursday, April 11 from 6-7:30 pm. It is one of their favorite family events of the year and a great opportunity to showcase family traditions, share favorite recipes, demonstrate a traditional performance or activity, or learn about a place or culture .
- The Smart Smiles Program through Dental Associates of Walpole will be at the ECEC this week teaching all students in PK and Kindergarten about the importance of good oral hygiene.
- ECEC is once again partnering with the Special Olympics to be a Unified Champion School. Since March not only includes Spread the Word Inclusion Day but also is National Disabilities Awareness month, Cerebral Palsy Awareness month, the start of World Autism week and World Down Syndrome Day, the ECEC will host its second Spread the Word Inclusion Week which will take place March 18-22th.
- For seniors not enrolled in a Wellness elective this year, the DHS grade 12 physical education requirement will take place during the underclass MCAS exam on Tuesday, March 26 or Wednesday, March 27. They are required to attend the date which they have been assigned to receive credit for their Grade 12 Physical Education Graduation Requirement.
- DHS will be hosting an On the Spot Admissions Day for seniors tomorrow, Thursday, March 21. During this event, seniors will have the opportunity to meet with admissions counselors to review their applications and receive an admissions decision while in the meeting.

Superintendent Update

- Supt. Murphy gave heartfelt thanks to Principals Hermesch and McGowan for their involvement in the building project. She confirmed that school leadership have intentions to continue to improve the Greenlodge School facility. She also thanked Drs. Kelly, Stetson and Smith for their roles in the building project process by providing information to the MSBA in a timely manner.

- March is Women’s History Month and the Supt. showed the events honoring women. STEMInist Conference at Roxbury Community was attended by some of our Middle and High School students. She recognized the female leaders at the district who attended the Women’s Leadership Conference in Framingham.
- DEF Spelling Bee – Riverdale took home the Spelling Bee trophy. She said she was amazed at the spelling skills exhibited by the teams.
- Inspection and monitoring of School Facilities are being undertaken by Dr. Kelly and Mat Haffner. Tours are scheduled to look for safety and capital improvements. The goal is to focus on issues that are under our control.
- Sixteen Middle School Art students have been selected to present their art at the K-12 virtual state Art Exhibit.
- Sample pages were shown from the DPS social media site that is open for families to follow.
- School Transition Plans. Opportunities will be available for students and families to tour and meet teachers in their new schools.

Ms. Twomey thanked the school for linking the High School course enrollment catalog so parents can see what is available.

Ms. McCormick said its important to objectify what students are exposed to every day in our school facilities.

Education Report

- Oakdale School Spirit Color – Principal Kimberly Hermesch

Principal Hermesch talked about the loss of Christine Stec and what she meant to the Town of Dedham. The Oakdale School often honors her with the color purple. She would like to ask that Oakdale school colors be changed to purple and white in Christine’s honor.

The Supt. said they are happy to see the colors transition to purple and white.

Mr. Hebert said even though the School Committee does not have purview over this decision, they would be pleased to vote in favor of the request.

Motion was made to make purple and white the official colors for Oakdale School. Motion was approved by a vote of 7-0.

- Winter Sports Update – Athletic Director Stephen Traister

Mr. Traister reported that 220 student athletes participated in sports at DHS this past winter. He provided an update and highlights of the Middle and High School teams.

He said that the new DHS field has made sports so much more enjoyable for the students. He made a comment that there is a need for more tennis courts in Dedham.

Mr. Traister talked about the plans for introducing the 8th graders to High School sports. He said that scores and game outcomes are posted on X (formerly Twitter) every day.

- Superintendent’s Evaluation

Ms. Twomey requested the superintendent add a little more evidence about her vision for aligning academic achievement activities.

Mr. Hebert announced that Dr. Flynn Gallant has volunteered to organize the evaluation feedback. Forms should be returned by March 26th.

Supt. Murphy and Mr. Hebert will meet to discuss the evaluation before the April 3rd School Committee meeting.

Business Report

- FY25 Budget Planning Update

Dr. Kelly said he is putting together the 3rd qtr. budget for April. He said it has come to his attention that the kilowatt hour projection is higher than budgeted by a substantial amount. He will be confirming the differential and reporting back to the group about that.

Dr. Kelly reported that Supt. Murphy and he met with the Finance and Warrant Committee about the budget on March 12th. They have also met about the budget with the leadership of six out of the seven schools.

A Community Forum about the budget will be held on April 4th and Supt. Murphy and Dr. Kelly will meet with Town leaders this week. If the budget needs to be capped at 8% increase, then we need to get a firm idea of the budget so that we are able to notify employees of layoffs before June 15th.

Dr. Kelly also reported that eight facility visits have been completed. Short and long-term concerns are being identified.

Mr. Polito thanked Dr. Kelly and the superintendent for taking such a vested interest in school facilities.

- Discussion & Vote to Accept and Authorize the School Committee Chair and Superintendent to sign the Town of Dedham Combined Financial Policies document

Mr. Polito said after much dialogue and interface with Town leadership, the financial policies document is ready for review. He clarified that the updated policy does not require changes to any of the existing School Committee policy.

Dr. Flynn Gallant reported the team involved in the financial policies process focused on ensuring that the policy is written in layman terms.

Motion was made to accept and authorize the School Committee Chair and the Superintendent to sign the Town of Dedham combined financial policies document. Motion was approved by a vote of 7-0.

Subcommittees Updates

- Budget

No further info.

- Curriculum Advisory

No updates.

- Facilities

Mr. Acosta reported that a tour of the high school will be held this Saturday at 11 am. Other Town committees and the public are welcome to join the tour.

- Negotiations

No updates.

- Policy

Mr. Acosta asked for members to submit any comments about policy description changes as soon as possible. He is planning to reach out to MASC about best practices in policy implementation.

- SBRC

Next meeting will be held on Monday night at 6:30 at Town Hall.

Donations

Dedham Educational Partnership has donated \$1200 to support the purchase of an exercise bike for the high school athletic program.

Motion was made to accept the donation of \$1200 from the Dedham Educational Partnership and approved by a 7-0 vote.

Review and Approval Vote of Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion was made to approve the February 28, 2024 meeting minutes and approved by a 7-0 vote.

Motion was made to approve the March 6, 2024 meeting minutes and approved by a 6-0 vote. (Ms. McCormick was absent for that meeting).

Old/New Business

Mr. Polito reminded the group that the Executive Session minutes review needs to be finalized.

Acknowledgements and Announcements

Ms. Briggs reached out to the community to partner with the School Committee to ensure that small neighborhood schools continue to be a focus. Three more school buildings are needed and we need the Town to support our endeavors in this regard. A solid financial building plan needs to be developed.

Dr. Flynn Gallant announced that tomorrow is World Down's Syndrome Day. This is about how everyone is more alike than different and how different modes of learning are necessary.

Motion was made to adjourn the meeting. Motion was approved with a roll call vote of 7-0.

Submitted by

Virginia Quinn

Recording Secretary