

Salem School Committee
Meeting Minutes
Monday, February 12, 2017

A Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting of the Salem School Committee was held on Monday, February 12, 2017, following the Public Hearing on the Recommendation to Dissolve the Nathaniel Bowditch School and Relocate the Horace Mann Laboratory School at 9:26 p.m. in the School Committee Chambers at Collins Middle School, 29 Highland Avenue, Salem, MA.

Members Present: Ms. Mary Manning, Ms. Kristine Wilson, Ms. Ana Nuncio, Mr. Manny Cruz, Ms. Amanda Campbell, and Mayor Kimberley Driscoll

Members Absent: Mr. James Fleming

Others Present: Margarita Ruiz, Superintendent, Kate Carbone, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, Margaret Marotta, Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Personnel Services, Kristin Shaver, Business Manager, Jill Conrad, Chief of Systems Strategy, Kelley Rice, Chief of Communications, and members of the Salem Community

Call to Order

Mayor Driscoll called the Committee of the Whole (COW) Meeting to order at 9:26 p.m.

Discussion on Moving the Head Start Next Year to the YMCA

For clarification, Ms. Wilson said that Superintendent Ruiz mentioned today the moving of the Pre-School over to the Collins Middle School and had referred to it last week as the Head Start and asked Ms. Ruiz if she meant the Pre-School or just the Head Start. Ms. Ruiz responded that she meant the Head Start and then looking into adding and expanding possible pre-school opportunities. Ms. Wilson asked if it would be for next year. Mayor Driscoll and Superintendent Ruiz responded that they would have class space available. Ms. Ruiz said it would not be the ECC. Ms. Driscoll said it would be the YMCA.

Discussion on Alternative Options

Mayor Driscoll commented that she is concerned for the students at the Nathaniel Bowditch School. They have been through this for a number of years and she has been around this table, tables at the Bowditch School with parents, with different successions of the leadership they had there, and unfortunately have not had the types of success they want with respect to the achievement MCAS issues. Ms. Driscoll asked Superintendent Ruiz if there is a potential Plan B should the Nathaniel Bowditch School continue. Superintendent Ruiz responded that she had not mentioned before that part of the original recommendations that the intervention plan was to move the middle school to the Collins and strongly feels that should be an option on the table. That would leave the Bowditch K-5 as a stand-alone elementary school. They could consider deepening the work with keeping it as an elementary school. Ms. Ruiz continued that she is very concerned about the idea of merging the Horace Mann with the Bowditch school from several fronts. The Horace Mann School, based on the assignment policy presented, is currently balanced in terms of its enrollment as is also shown in the data presented earlier during the School Committee meeting. Ms. Ruiz stated that she would not recommend merging the Horace Mann with the Bowditch School.

Other Option

Ms. Ruiz explained that the option would be to move the middle school to the Collins and keep the Bowditch School as K-5, but that would be very challenging and problematic. Another process that was thought about, after moving the middle school to the Collins, was a merge of the Bowditch K-5 with the Carlton School. Mayor Driscoll added that it would be because there is high demand for Carlton. Superintendent Ruiz agreed and continued that it is a high performing school. One concern they have with the Carlton model is the much smaller scale transitions. Superintendent Ruiz said she is concerned about having the 180 plus students they would have at Bowditch all beginning at the same time, within that model. Other concerns would be the staffing they would need to add throughout the school. Due to the innovation school model, a merger with Carlton may require more staff than currently budgeted. Such a move would likely require amendments to the school's innovation plan, which would take time to develop. These are concerning if they were to do this by September. Ms. Wilson asked if Carlton has expressed an interest in becoming a K-8 school. Superintendent Ruiz responded that some members of the Carlton community have expressed this, but it is not clear how much consensus there is on this issue. Ms. Ruiz said that they would have to balance the school and look at the kinds of challenges and stressors they would be adding to a higher performing school.

Current Plan

Superintendent Ruiz stated that with the plan they currently have on the table they would be sending the students to higher performing schools in a thoughtful way that they would add the support as opposed to having one school having to absorb between 180 – 200 students (rounded) all at once. Members agreed that it could be overwhelming for any one school, especially one with a relatively new Principal such as the Carlton has right now, to take this on.

Two-Way/Dual-Language Program

Mayor Driscoll stated that there is healthy romanticism around the Two-Way program. The Federal Street School was a sought-after school when it started. It went into a new building. This dual-language program was highly regarded and worked very well for years. Ms. Driscoll continued that it was her impression that they had a really tough time recruiting staff, somewhere along the lines, along with some of the leadership challenges. It became hard to continue as a two-way school and to pave the way. Mayor Driscoll asked Superintendent Ruiz why the two-way school is not a consideration. Superintendent Ruiz confirmed that the Bowditch School has not been a two-way dual language school for years and is not one now. It is important to build a successful dual-language program, one grade level at a time, and is done when a school is stable, when there is a certain level of academic performance in the school, with qualified instructors on the English side of things, and adequate staffing as dual-language has its own set of challenges. It is difficult to find fully certified and licensed bilingual teachers, with written and oral language proficiency to teach it effectively. Being bilingual by itself is not sufficient. Teachers must also be fully licensed in grade and content area. Ms. Ruiz continued that staffing, for a dual-language program, is very complex. Building a dual-language program now at the Bowditch School would not be successful given its current conditions and is a long-term proposition.

Excellence Language Learning Initiative

The district is looking into ways to expand and improve language learning throughout the district. Rebecca Westlake, Director of the ELL Department, has put together an initiative called Excellence Language Learning for everyone in Salem. There is a group that is looking and researching, within that initiative, the programs in the Look Bill. They need to search different models more deeply to see where they have fertile ground in the district. They need to have truly invested leadership that can rally the teachers, something that was done at the Federal

Street School. Superintendent Ruiz continued that it has been her understanding the Federal Street School was already a successful dual-language school by the time it was moved to Willson Street. They have a group that is researching those programs to make recommendations for the future.

Spanish Language Program

Ms. Ruiz reported that they are also doing a review of the Spanish as a Second Language, instruction in the district. They have several schools that are teaching Spanish as a 2nd language. The review involves finding out if they have the right curriculum and best materials, for example, and have that group come up with recommendations. Ms. Ruiz said that her vision is to have all the Salem students in the district have Spanish as a 2nd language, in addition to considering a possible dual-language program.

Seal of Biliteracy Program

They have a group looking into the Seal of Biliteracy certificate this year, which is a credential that students would have on their High School Diploma that certifies that they are fully bilingual in two, or even three, languages. There is a process to establish and assessments that students can take to do that. These all fall within the language learning initiative they have not abandoned as a district. Superintendent Ruiz stated there is a deep sense, within the community, that they are losing that commitment if they close the Bowditch school when they are actually recommitting themselves to that, striving to do it successfully as was done back in the late 1980s – when the Federal Street School was established. Ms. Ruiz continued that they would need to have a strong, deeply invested, and willful leader who could also generate excitement among the staff, for any development, such as the Dual-Language program and Innovation School, to move forward. Those things are hard to do when they have leadership and staff turnover.

Two-Way/Dual-Language Program (continued)

Members continued discussion on the Two-Way Dual-Language Program. Mayor Driscoll asked Superintendent Ruiz where the Nathaniel Bowditch School currently stands with the two-way dual language program, where they have wide achievement gaps. Ms. Wilson added that the Bowditch School also has most non-tenured teachers. Members shared further discussion, insight, and feedback on the difficulty of hiring staff for the program. Ms. Manning said that the challenge was more than just hiring difficulties. Finding staff had always been difficult to find for the program but positions were also cut during the budget process. It decreased from one Spanish and English teacher for the different subjects, in each grade level, to someone doing two of the Spanish and enough English where they could do one English and 6th and a 7th grade. It was cut and chipped away. The 1st issue was the budget. The 2nd issue was the difficulty in finding the right people.

Discussion on World Language

Ms. Manning added that it sounds as if there is a roll out of Spanish for the English speakers at the Collins School when she hears others and the Superintendent speak in reference to World Language. Ms. Manning continued that they have a very watered down program compared to what they had before. They had students go through both East and West for years. When they merged as Collins, the 6th graders did exploratory both of two quarters: one in French and one in Spanish and then picked whether they were going to take French or Spanish. Then 7th and 8th graders took French and Spanish full-time, full hour period a day that counted as an academic class with a grade. Ms. Manning continued that she believes that the Spanish classes students are taking are rolled into the Specialist schedule. Members agreed that all elementary schools have Spanish. Ms. Manning pointed out that it is nothing like a true program of a 2nd language.

Superintendent Ruiz responded they have staff looking into that to seek what they need to do to make it better. Ms. Ruiz wanted to counter the narrative that Bowditch is the only school where students could possibly learn Spanish as a second language. Mayor Driscoll stated that is ideally one opportunity for them to recognize that they have Latino students throughout Salem schools and parents who would love their child to be exposed to, and hopefully become proficient in a second language. Hopefully, the only way to do that is not through a two-way program. They would need to look into what other linguistic options they might have within the district and consider a realistic timeline to do something like that. They do not want to overpromise and underperform for parents who might be interested in something like that.

Mayor Driscoll continued that it would be good, in terms of additional information, to calculate out. What are those Spanish language options, in other places as they get teased out, going to look like as they potentially look to close the school: what is the timeline and realistic commitment for that? Superintendent Ruiz responded that the answer would come out of the work of these teams and that it is precisely what these teams have been charged with doing, which is looking into:

- What do they have in place?
- What are the recommendations from these committees in increasing access in the district?
- What are opportunities in terms of dual language and other type of programming that the new bill has made available?

Mayor Driscoll asked about the timing of the work that is going on with the committees. Ms. Ruiz responded this is something that has very recently gone underway and can have Rebecca Westlake put in a timeline.

Discussion on Proposal

Mayor Driscoll asked if there was anything from the joint labor management proposal, beyond moving the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades, they have not yet moved forward on? Mayor Driscoll remembered the conscious decision not to implement the 6th, 7th, and 8th move, because it was a March conversation and the fear was that if one is a 5th grade parent, for example, they would maybe decide to pursue other options for not having enough time. The recommendation was felt too fast, the new leader wanted to make it happen, and it was not implemented. Mayor Driscoll asked if there was anything else in the list of recommendations. Ms. Carbone responded that something underway now, with the teams that Superintendent Ruiz had just mentioned, is one recommendation to appoint a team to research effective language programs. Mayor Driscoll clarified it is one thing underway and nothing else. Members agreed. Superintendent Ruiz said there are copies of the recommendations in the data packet.

Applications - General Pool Positions

Ms. Manning wondered if teachers are currently applying on Talent Ed for positions in Salem before a vote is made. Ms. Conrad responded that teachers are able to apply, at any time, for vacancies in the district. Ms. Manning wondered which positions they would be applying for if there aren't any listed. Ms. Ruiz wondered if pools are posted. Ms. Conrad responded there are general teacher pools that are posted to begin attracting them to Salem and is done every year. Positions are not specific job postings nor are they for specific schools at this time. Ms. Wilson asked if retirement was announced to which they might be applying for. Ms. Manning asked for clarification on the meaning of pool posting. Ms. Conrad explained the need to recruit a certain number of special education and other types of teachers every year due to vacancies, so they have a general "pool" posting for special education teachers. Ms. Manning clarified that applicants would submit their applications for special education in general and not any

particular special education position. Superintendent Ruiz and Ms. Conrad agreed. Ms. Conrad said it is helpful to have the pools posted to direct people to apply to Salem Public Schools when they go out to recruitment fairs. These are candidates who apply early, stating their interest to work in Salem.

Assignment Process for Families

Superintendent Ruiz stated that it goes back to the issue of balancing, planning and providing information. They have laid out the process to families in the assignment process to receive the family's preferences. No assignments will be made until the decision comes from the Committee. They are not assigning students at this time. Mayor Driscoll asked if they are collecting the data. Ms. Ruiz responded they are collecting family preferences. They explain the transfer process, assignment policy, and ask families to select their top 3 choices as the assignment policy calls for. They have the families fill out the form. No confirmations or promises are made to families; they are only seeking their preferences in order for the district to be ready if and when the time comes.

Teachers

Similarly, a process to identify the preferences and interests of current staff members is underway. Liza Bento, Director of Human Capital, spent most of last week personally meeting individually with teachers to let them know of the opportunities that are available should they consider other options and for them to let her know what they are interested in. No confirmations or promises are made to teachers; they are just seeking their preferences. Ms. Wilson asked if this applies to everyone or just tenured. Superintendent Ruiz responded it is for everyone and stated that she, Beth Kontos, and the team held three different meetings at the Nathaniel Bowditch School to provide teachers with general information about the process. They met with tenured teachers and explained what the process might look like and of the available positions, should the School Committee approve the recommendations.

Non-Professional Staff

They met with the non-professional staff the following day and explained to them that they would post all available specific (not the general pool) positions they have in the different schools after professional teachers have been placed. They would then have an opportunity to apply and go through the interview process with the principals in the district before those positions are opened up to external candidates. They are given that priority. Ms. Ruiz continued they did this in a period of two weeks. They explained these possibilities to teachers and staff, because they also wanted to address possible anxieties that come with not knowing. Applicants were not provided with specific dates or assignments.

Centrally Deployed Staff

Superintendent Ruiz continued they also met with the centrally deployed staff such as adjustment counselors and some of the special education teachers that are centrally assigned to follow the students. They explained to them that they would be looking to where students would be assigned to, that students are not leaving the district, and they need to see where the students are in order to employ them accordingly.

Discussion on Information Provided

The goal of those conversations is to provide everyone with the possible scenarios to prevent confusion and doubt. Superintendent Ruiz continued that they were very careful with providing the necessary information and documentation shared, pending School Committee approval. They tried to balance the information provided, in terms of what to expect, to give the sense that it is not concrete, it is a recommendation, but they want to be ready.

Discussion on Alternative Options Continued

Mr. Cruz clarified on the Mayor's point earlier on having an alternative option, that if the recommendation is not approved, they would be potentially be looking at the 2015 plan that recommends turning it into a K-5 School and then moving the 6th and 7th graders over to the Collins Middle School. Superintendent Ruiz agreed. Mayor Driscoll stated they would have to vote on that. Members agreed. Members began discussion on the setback of timing. Mayor Driscoll stated that School Committee members, at that time, were not willing to support it, because families did not support it. It was very late in the year and Mayor Driscoll and School Committee members felt it somewhat blindsided families, because the discussion was very late in the school year. Mr. Cruz informed that members of the community have concern and feel there doesn't seem to be an alternative and feels it is important to articulate this information to the families. Superintendent Ruiz responded that the reason she has not presented this alternative is because she does not think that keeping Bowditch as a K-5 is going to fundamentally address the issues they have in the school. They would have the same issues as a K-5 that they have now as a K-8. Ms. Ruiz continued they could put it as an alternative but cautions the Committee about that option, because she does not think it gets to the heart of the challenge for students and feels that students would be better served by the recommendation on the table.

Concerns

Ms. Campbell commented that she continuously hears the sense of urgency and understands that students do not have time to wait. Falling behind is cumulative, meaning that the more they fall behind causes further delays in moving forward. Ms. Campbell continued that she has significant concerns because she also knows, and has experienced, the firsthand effects of a plan that was not thought out or followed through with. Students, more than not having time to waste, do not have time to lose on the long-term effects of a plan that is not followed through with. The plan right now, as it stands, does not do anything for the achievement gap and does not truly desegregate the schools; it just puts them somewhere else. There is no guarantee what the following years would look like. Ms. Campbell needs to know and see there is a follow-up plan and that supports are put in place. They have this plan in front of them now and have had it for a week. It is hard to feel comfortable making an immediate decision knowing that these students had already been promised for years that the issues were being worked on and these students deserve the best. Ms. Campbell stated she needs to know what specific supports are in place, at the receiving schools, for the students. What sorts of professional developments are going to be in place (the front loading of the PD at the start of the year is definitely something she is interested in), would they be increasing special educational supports, is there thought to paraprofessionals and speech teachers from the Bowditch, would there be follow-ups, are they doing another dump and run, etc. Members continued further discussion. Ms. Campbell expressed her concern that she is not sure the community has a reason to trust the School Committee right now and she does not know what the plan is and so cannot trust she knows what is going to happen. Mayor Driscoll said that is a fair point and suggested coming up with some hypotheticals that can demonstrate what a resource team might look like at a receiving school and perhaps a type of standard where if they had a certain number of ELL students going – there is a ratio of this to that, for example. Members continued discussion on information to view their definition of what their fully staffed and supportive school looks like and allocation of resources for a receiving school in Salem. Members shared feedback, insight, and further discussion.

School Name

Ms. Manning asked when would the school name issue arise if the recommendation were to be approved. Mayor Driscoll responded that it would have to be addressed the same evening of the vote. Ms. Nuncio commented that the big change would be to consider things from the standpoint of those parents who feel dispossessed. These are parents who feel they do not have as much political clout or political capital as everyone else, and Bowditch means something for all of them as a seat of language learning. Ms. Nuncio explained that research supports that students do much better in their studies and acquisition of English when they have a base in their own first language. That research has been there for 60 years. Members agreed. Ms. Nuncio continued that it is her sense that if Rebecca could provide that information to them, and more than a task force, it is sort of the beginning building blocks of what they would have at Bowditch and a few other schools. To show what this would look like would be a way forward. Ms. Manning asked Ms. Nuncio if she is saying that she would like to keep the name as Bowditch. Ms. Nuncio responded that she would, because it is remarkably emblematic about language learning. They have to listen deeply to what people are saying. Their Social Justice curriculum is in their listening to the parents. Mr. Cruz added that it is about identity and dignity of those parents. The dignities of those communities are put at stake when using erasure in trying to create equity. He can empathize with those parents because he has attachment to the Horace Mann for having attended. They would need to deliberate an alternative name, if something were to be moved forward; they would need to have a conversation about keeping the name. Some of the comments that have been made suggest that one name would stay if a plan passes. It is the same problem they have with the alternative option, it does not appear that it exists. Mr. Cruz continued discussion on the name and stated he could not think of a better person to commemorate, and speak to this commitment of dual-language, than Arlene Dannenberg who he considered to be a former phenomenal educator and thought leader in the Salem community. Mr. Cruz stated he is certainly in accord with Ms. Manning and Ms. Nuncio that they need to have very thoughtful and deliberative process with reference to the School name. Members shared feedback and continued further discussion on the topic.

Ms. Campbell said she appreciates the comments on the school name but that it feels a bit premature to discuss naming the new building at this time when they have yet to vote. Ms. Manning responded that it is only due to the Mayor's previous response to her question that they would have to address the name the same evening of the vote. Mayor Driscoll said that the proposal, as she knows it, is that the Superintendent would be closing the Bowditch School and relocating students to other schools in the district, hopefully with appropriate services and resources and relocating the Horace Mann School into that building. Some students might stay but the vast majority of students are from the Horace Mann. There is a strong community there, they have a laboratory school, and are connected to Salem State. An entire collection of people would feel strongly against being told that they are going to add some of the Bowditch students and so their name would have to change. That is a whole other discussion to have for the collection of people who feel very strongly about their school. Mayor Driscoll continued that the Horace Mann Laboratory School has history, has a strong and engaged community. Ms. Driscoll stated that it is her understanding that the proposal is to relocate the Horace Mann, not close it. Superintendent Ruiz agreed. Ms. Manning commented that she wants time to discuss it. Members agreed and continued further discussion. Members also discussed the strong need for an Early Ed movement in Salem, opportunity to reframe the Early Ed component at Bowditch, and the need for more Early Ed.

Summation

- Receiving school component is very important
- Recognizing that if this does not happen, that Plan B would primarily be doubling down efforts to hopefully try to improve on what they are doing at the K-5 level - left after the

- Move out of the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades over to the Collins - not Superintendent Ruiz's recommendation

Additional Information for Next Meeting

- Members agreed to get some timeline and whatever information Superintendent Ruiz can share on the Spanish multiple linguistic options that might exist within their district to get a better handle on receiving districts
- Suite of services that would be available; maybe some of the hypotheticals may be teased – what that might look like
- Further discussion on the name - Mayor Driscoll is open for ideas, insights, and suggestions on the name idea – maybe have some offline conversations about it

Members agreed to wait to receive the additional information for careful review, have a deliberation and vote for the recommendation listed on the agenda at the next regular School Committee meeting, and table it as needed to the following regular School Committee meeting on either March 8 or 12. Members agreed for the March 5th regular School Committee meeting cancellation, as not all members would be present.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Committee of the Whole (COW) School Committee this evening. Ms. Manning entertained the motion to adjourn. Ms. Wilson seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by:

Angelica Alayon, Secretary
Salem School Committee

Meeting Materials

COW Notice 2/12/18

Proposed Recommendation by Superintendent

Presentation to School Committee 2/12/18 (Keeping Our Promise Increasing Equity and Access in the Salem Public Schools)

2018-19 Enrollment Targets for Student Assignment Overview

Data Packet for 2/12/12 School Committee Meeting and Public Hearing