

Salem School Committee
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, April 11, 2018

A Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting of the Salem School Committee was held on Wednesday, April 11, 2018 at 5:50 p.m. in the School Committee Chambers at Collins Middle School, 29 Highland Avenue, Salem, MA.

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

Members Absent: Ms. Amanda Campbell

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, and Kelley Rice, Chief of Communications.

Call to Order

Mayor Driscoll called the School Committee of the Whole (COW) Meeting to order at 5:50 p.m.

School Committee of the Whole (COW) Meeting

Mayor Driscoll explained that the purpose of the Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting is to talk about:

- Some of the work with respect to the Education Equity Subcommittee
- The School Naming policy and the creation of an Ad Hoc committee to consider a potential new name for the Horace Mann Laboratory School after it relocates to 79 Willson Street
- An update with respect to the Nathaniel Bowditch School (NBS) student reassignment process, to give them a sense of how it is working and for possible improvements in its practices and policies

Assignment Process of Students Transferring From the Nathaniel Bowditch to Other Schools in the District

Superintendent Ruiz recalled that the School Committee previously talked about the Student Assignment policy. One of the new additions to their policy was that the Superintendent would set targets to bring the schools closer to the economically versus the non-economically disadvantaged. Mayor Driscoll agreed and added that it was based on the student population targets to see if their Student Assignment policy was effectively working to achieve enrollment balance. Superintendent Ruiz continued that those targets were set in January, prior to the vote to close the Nathaniel Bowditch School (NBS) with the assumption that the Bowditch would remain open next year. Following the vote to close the NBS, the district was charged with the process of reassigning the students to new schools. They knew two things coming into this process:

1. That the targets set in January did not account for the potential closure of the school
2. The students of the Nathaniel Bowditch School, the population itself, is a much higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students versus the district average, which is 48.9% whereas the Nathaniel Bowditch School is at 73%

Ms. Ruiz explained that staff was not sure whether or not the January enrollment targets would work. The concern was whether or not the economically disadvantaged group would have an

equal chance of getting one of their choices. To test this out, staff undertook the reassignment process by following two different methods. The main tenets of the student assignment policy were followed in both methods, the only difference was the enrollment targets that were used. Method 1 used the targets that had been set in January and Method 2 used targets of 75/25 percent to allow more choice for economically disadvantaged. The outcome of both methods were measured to see how they achieved the overall policy goals of maximizing choice for the families, equity in choice, keeping siblings together, and ensuring overall enrollment balance within 5% points of the district-wide average. Superintendent Ruiz continued that the difference was significant enough for her that warranted putting a halt to sending out the assignments, so that the School Committee could review the process and provide guidance on which method was best. Superintendent Ruiz passed out a draft overview of the 2018 Nathaniel Bowditch School (NBS) assignment process and Enrollment Target handout for cross-reference and walked members through the tabled data.

Method 1

Superintendent Ruiz explained that they used the January enrollment target, she previously presented to the School Committee, for the first method. The January targets were used in Method 1. Method 1 yielded the following results: 70% of families were assigned to their first choice, 85.3% got one of their three choices, 69% of low-income families got one of their three choices, and 75% of siblings were assigned together.

Method 2

Superintendent Ruiz explained that they used the 75% economically disadvantaged versus 25% non-economically disadvantaged as enrollment targets for this method. Method 2 yielded the following results: 73% of families were assigned to their first choice, 93.5% got one of their three choices, 89.7% of low-income families got one of their three choices, and 83.1% of siblings were assigned together.

The enrollment balance for all schools was similar for both methods, however, Method 1 yielded a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students for the Horace Mann Laboratory School, putting it further out of balance with the rest of the district, than did Method 2. Superintendent Ruiz concluded that the overall goals of the assignment policy were better met with Method 2 and this method yielded better data, in the tenets of achieving balance and keeping siblings together, in every category.

Superintendent Ruiz conveyed that Method 2 maximizes family choice; more economically disadvantaged families got one of their choices, and it would keep more siblings together. It would achieve the overall goal of maximizing choice while achieving enrollment balance. Ms. Ruiz continued that she wanted to present this informative data to the School Committee for review and their decision.

Members reviewed and discussed the data, the number of families who received their first choice preference, shared feedback and further discussion.

Difference of Both Methods is in the Equity

Mayor Driscoll said she did not see significant differences in both methods. Superintendent Ruiz responded that the difference is in the equity of the families that are economically and non-economically disadvantaged in terms of getting one of their three choices. Mayor Driscoll agreed and clarified that she understands the difference would be that the economically disadvantaged families would actually be less served in Method 1. Members agreed.

Target Enrollment

Mayor Driscoll asked the members for any concerns if (hypothetically) they were to adopt Method 2, which does stray from some of the enrollment targets that were established in January. Ms. Driscoll continued that those targets were done at a time before they were looking at major shifts in population. Superintendent Ruiz conveyed that the policy states that the Superintendent would set new targets every year based on the district's current enrollment; there is a revision of those targets every year.

Choice for Method 2

Mayor Driscoll said that she is more comfortable with Method 2, because it would maximize choice for their economically disadvantaged families, and although not significantly, it would widen the scope for families getting their first choice of school. Members reviewed the enrollment balance data. Ms. Manning agreed that Method 2 would be the better option, because it would do the most for most families and wondered what would happen if they did not follow the already established Method 1. Mayor Driscoll explained that the reason for the Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting this evening is because there was a directive in December, before any of this transition was anticipated or expected, and that the targets before them are for next year's enrollment. They now had a major shift in population and are adjusting the targeted enrollments.

Mr. Cruz agreed that Method 2 is the better option, because it would help 90% of low-income families get one of their three choices; they would be increasing choices for those families and keeping more siblings together. Mr. Cruz expressed that if they need to adjust policy or take a vote on this matter and defend it publicly, it is the School Committee's responsibility to do so. Mr. Cruz continued that he is inclined to support that the Superintendent use Method 2, because it would increase equity for all families. Ms. Nuncio agreed with Mr. Cruz and shared that where there is substantial difference in Method 2 for achieving equity, a predominant theme in their discussions. Ms. Nuncio shared that Method 2 is better, because it honors family preferences and emphasized the importance of transparency; to mention to families the availability of Methods 1 and 2, and what the School Committee chose to use.

Ms. Manning motioned the use of Method 2 and that the School Committee relies on the Superintendent this evening to provide a brief explanation of any subtle differences that may have been between the two. Mr. Cruz seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Formation of the Educational Equity Subcommittee

Ms. Nuncio reported that the Policy Subcommittee met on April 2nd, 2018 to discuss the formation of the Educational Equity Subcommittee, the naming policy for the new school at 79 Willson Street, and the status of the policy review. Their discussion centered on the universally shared belief that equity, as a guiding principle, should inform all policies and procedures of the School Committee and the various subcommittees. Some of them were feeling uncomfortable about having a stand-alone Educational Equity Subcommittee but, in the end, members present recognized the necessity of establishing an Equity Subcommittee to guide the School Committee's work this year in order to advance the work of establishing and implementing equitable policies and practices for students, parents, teachers and administrators within the district.

Ms. Nuncio informed that Policy Subcommittee members, Mr. Cruz, and herself will engage in a fact-finding process to gather information about the policies and practices that foster an advanced equity and other gateway city school districts such as Chelsea, Lawrence, Lynn,

Malden, Revere, and Somerville; cities with large numbers of immigrant students and whether they have addressed equity – separated out that issue and informed the practice and policy. Ms. Nuncio continued informing that Mr. Cruz and she will also engage other School Committee members to gather their ideas on the topic of how they can advance equity within the school district, including conducting an equity review of the decision-making processes within their school community itself. Ms. Nuncio continued that the Policy Subcommittee also heard a report from Emily Ullman, Director of Extended Learning, on an interesting initiative that she is managing, the initiative of authentic community engagement and equity reviews that they are doing with each school.

Ms. Nuncio said they look forward to engaging with, and learning more, from all participants in that line of work – that particular inquiry that Ms. Ullman is directing. This would soon be carried out at Witchcraft Heights Elementary, Bates Elementary, and the Collins Middle School this spring. An end date for the Policy Subcommittee fact-finding investigative work process was established for December 14 with a goal that Subcommittee members would share the results and recommendations with the School Committee body by mid December –at the end of this year.

Members sought clarification on the need for an actual Equity Subcommittee, shared concerns, and continued further discussion on the topic. Mayor Driscoll expressed that she thinks it is a great idea to have an Equity Subcommittee. It can be given special focus. It is the job of everyone to have that embedded in the work but all the more reason they want to have a smaller group of members tasked with initiatives, goals, and metrics as they think about the comprehensive work - who can zero in and dive a little bit deeper when necessary in particular areas – even in reviewing data.

Mayor Driscoll continued that the first step is to get the language, regarding the scope of work that the Equity Subcommittee would be responsible for. That would need to be presented before the body. It would need to state that they are forming an Equity Subcommittee and express what their responsibilities would be. This description would need to come from the Policy Subcommittee, to the School Committee, for recommendation that they would then vote on. This would take three readings. Once the Equity Subcommittee is established, its members would then decide the items they want to work on. The Equity Subcommittee does not exist at this time. If the Committee decides they want to do it, they would have to identify it, give it a policy number, and give it a scope. Mayor Driscoll continued that she would love for the Policy Subcommittee to formulate that language and refer it to the School Committee for approval. Ms. Nuncio agreed and said that part of that would emerge after their fact-finding process. Ms. Nuncio shared that she thinks that more of their fellow School Committee members should be part of that fact-finding process, not just Mr. Cruz and she.

Mayor Driscoll agreed and said that members will be assigned to that/the Equity Subcommittee and it will be a well-rounded body that can take on the tasks of fact-finding. Mr. Cruz clarified his recollection that School Committee members had previously agreed that this Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting would be the first opportunity to seek feedback on the proposal of the Equity Subcommittee.

Mayor Driscoll asked members if they thought it would make sense for the Committee of the Whole (COW) to take a motion to say they support the idea of an Equity Subcommittee and look forward to seeing language that would set that up in terms of identifying where it would fit within the policy and coming up with a draft scope of responsibilities. All they would be voting for would be to give feedback to the Policy Subcommittee that they are supportive of the

concept and look forward to having language that can come before them as a body. Members agreed they do not need to motion for this at this time.

School Committee Policy #6504 School Naming

Ms. Nuncio reported that the process of appointing members of the naming committee would start upon completion of the new school assignments for students of the former Nathaniel Bowditch School. The selection of the naming committee members will follow the guidelines set forth in the School Committee Fresh Start resolution, which would map out the goals. They need an end date for selecting the name of the school before the school year ends, because the name would need to be on the building before the start of the next school year. Mayor Driscoll explained that she solicited feedback and received responses for who wanted to be part on certain committees and she put Ms. Campbell and Ms. Nuncio on that committee based on the responses. Ms. Driscoll continued that she thinks they should reach out to Salem State to get others and talk to the Horace Mann community, assembled through the principal, to get a staff member and a parent, for example, for representation on both ends.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Committee of the Whole (COW) School Committee this evening, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by:

Angelica Alayon, Secretary
Salem School Committee

Meeting Materials

Committee of the Whole (COW) School Committee Meeting Agenda

Policy #6504 School Naming

Draft Overview 2018 Nathaniel Bowditch School (NBS) Reassignment Assignment Process Handout

Updated Assignments by School and Grade Level Handout