

Salem School Committee
Meeting Minutes
Monday, November 20, 2017

A regular meeting of the Salem School Committee was held on Monday, November 20, 2017 at 7:12 p.m. in the School Committee Chambers at Collins Middle School, 29 Highland Avenue, Salem, MA.

Members Present: Mr. Patrick Schultz, Dr. Brendan Walsh, Ms. Mary Manning, Ms. Kristine Wilson, and Ms. Deborah Amaral

Members Absent: Mayor Kimberley Driscoll, 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, and Kelley Rice, Chief of Communications

Call to Order

Mr. Patrick Schultz called the regular meeting of the Salem School Committee to order at 7:12 p.m.

Approval of the Agenda

Ms. Amaral moved to approve the agenda as presented. Dr. Walsh seconded the motion. The Motion carried.

Approval of Minutes

Deliberation and Vote on the Minutes of the Regular School Committee meeting held November 4, 2017

Dr. Walsh motioned to approve the Minutes of the Regular School Committee meeting held on November 4, 2017. Ms. Amaral seconded the Motion. The Motion carried.

Questions and Comments From the Audience

There were no questions or comments from the audience.

Superintendent Report – Margarita Ruiz

Superintendent Ruiz reported that as the Committee knows, this year the district is putting a keen focus on Pillar 4 in the Strategic plan that is Strengthening Family and Community Engagement. Salem schools are piloting different initiatives to further engage families and community. The Bentley Academy Charter School is focusing on home visits. They have conducted 159 home visits with their scholar families this year. The feedbacks from families have been very positive, and students are taking great pride in welcoming teachers and staff into their homes. Collins Middle School students kicked off their week of gratitude by helping prepare and serve a Thanksgiving meal last Wednesday to 295 of their fellow students, families, and Collins Middle School staff. Superintendent Ruiz highlighted that all of the students at the Bates Elementary School, which is in partnership with the US TaeKwonDo, graduated last week from the 8-week program. Ninety percent of the families attended the graduation ceremony held last Wednesday. The students took TaeKwonDo lessons for an 8-week session. They took lessons twice a week during their physical education period. Teachers and staff have reported that the classes helped students' focus and concentrate in class, improved behavior in classrooms and hallways, and helped created a sense of pride, self-esteem, and comradery. The students received a free uniform. The martial arts program is focused in safety and showing respect and responsibility to self and community. Ms. Ruiz wished the students, families, staff, Salem Public Schools, and members of the School Committee a safe and happy holiday. She wished the Salem High Varsity Football team who faced Beverly this morning in the annual Thanksgiving game at the Bertram Field at 10am - kudos to Salem High and Beverly for facing

the cold this morning to celebrate the tradition. Superintendent Ruiz updated the committee with data that the committee had requested on the 2017 MCAS Student Performance data. The request was made at her previous presentation, held at the regular School Committee meeting, on November 4, 2017.

Superintendent Ruiz continued that they are still closely looking at the data and will be providing the Committee with a data packet, later this year, for their reference. Ms. Ruiz compared the performance of Salem Public Schools, in relation to state and urban district, at the last meeting. This evening, Ms. Ruiz presented how Salem compares with urban districts. Superintendent Ruiz walked members and the audience through her presentation of data comparisons.

Discussion on the Gap, Between the Salem Public Schools and the State, in Math for Students With Disabilities and English Language Learners

Mr. Schultz commented that the gap in math for students with disabilities and English Language learners was almost cut in half. Superintendent Ruiz agreed. He asked if she had any idea or insight as to why or what may have caused this. Ms. Ruiz responded that it is something they need to look at on the economically disadvantaged school data and confirmed that they would definitely take a deeper dive on this. Ms. Carbone said she would have to carefully look to see if it is polarized at particular school(s), students, etc., because they are reducing the gap in ELL and the other subgroups. They would have to make a careful review of school-by-school, grade level by grade level, and student level data.

Discussion on the Nathaniel Bowditch School

Superintendent Ruiz spoke further about the Bowditch School. She reminded members they might recall that she had, during the budget process, anticipated that there would be a significant disruption of the school with a resignation that took place around this time last year. In her 30 years' experience as an educator and doing this work, she understands it is extremely rare for a school to perform well on a standardized test when faced with such a significant leadership change, especially in a school that regularly experiences staff turnover. They had an opportunity to go to Harvard last week as part of the By All Means convening. The cities that are participating in the initiatives were looking very closely at the Achievement gaps during the convening. Superintendent Ruiz reported that she personally combed, and continue to comb, through the 2017 Student Performance data as well as for prior years.

Factors That Have Contributed to Lower Student Performance at the Bowditch School

Superintendent Ruiz continued that there are several factors, that have been years in the making, have contributed to lower student performance as compared to the district. These are things that need to be considered as they are thinking, analyzing, and contemplating the performance at the Nathaniel Bowditch School. They cannot do so without taking into account some of the things that have happened at the school in the past. One of them is the high turnover of the years and teachers at the school. There have been leadership and teacher turnovers in the school. The implementation of policies that were well intentioned but have left the school essentially segregated, with over 80% of the student body being students of color, with high levels of challenges, also need to be considered. Extensive research shows that non-balanced schools that do not reflect a city's population distribution, and where the privilege of social capital is not distributed, suffer enormously. They have the Bowditch School in Salem and there are others across the state.

Improvement Efforts at the Bowditch School

Superintendent Ruiz stated that she is more convinced that their shared effort to bring equity and access to the Bowditch School to reverse these inequities must continue. She recalled that the School Committee committed a number of investments to support the students and families at the Bowditch School in recognition of these inequities last spring, during the 2018 budget process. Some investments they incurred last year were the hires of new school leadership. A new consultant that specializes in the support of new teacher (teachers with less than 3 years experience) was brought in; that is a partner they invested in to bring in support. All teacher schedules were aligned to better support them and in

collaboration to meet the needs of the families. Staff were trained in responsive classrooms over the summer. This is a program geared to support classroom climate and culture. This year, they are providing teachers with a new social emotional curriculum that was piloted at the Horace Mann School. It has proven successful and is easy to implement for their teachers. Many teachers at the Bowditch School are currently training to leverage the needed morning structure to support positive classroom climate.

Superintendent Ruiz continued with further updates and informed members that the data presented this evening are all baseline data for 2017 and based on this data, will be building for years to come. Ms. Ruiz wants the School Committee to know that she is thinking deeply about the Nathaniel Bowditch School. She will be meeting with Ms. Carbone, Ms. Marotta, and Principal weekly. They are closely monitoring the progress of the school. She continued her update on the data percentages of the Bowditch School students that exceed, meet, and do not meet expectations, which point to many of the areas in need of further work. Ms. Ruiz informed members that she would continue to provide further updates of the Nathaniel Bowditch School.

Discussion on Data Comparison of Subgroups With Urban Schools Only

Dr. Walsh asked Superintendent Ruiz for a data of the subgroups of students with disabilities, ELLs, and Economic Disadvantage students with urban schools only. It would be interesting to prepare them to more social economically align communities, because they would be more accurate comparison with like communities. Superintendent Ruiz said they would do that. Mr. Schultz asked Superintendent Ruiz if they have identified the urban communities that are more socio-economically similar to Salem, with respect to other variations. Superintendent Ruiz responded that Haverhill and Somerville are, in terms of the demographic data, the two communities most similar to Salem.

Discussion on Concerns and Factors That Have Contributed to Lower Student Performance at the Nathaniel Bowditch School

Members shared insight, feedback, and concerns of the Nathaniel Bowditch School and continued with further discussion. Ms. Amaral stated that she appreciates the fact that the leadership at the Bowditch School is new but it has been never changing. She cautioned all future committees that this issue has been going too long. She stated that she believes this is the correct leadership. She wants to ensure that every support possible: the union, management, school administration, teachers, and parents all buy into this now as it is extremely important. Mr. Schultz echoed Ms. Amaral's comment. Leadership, who manage culture, is something that is not often taught. Mr. Schultz continued that one can get better at it with training but it certainly requires talent and structures and systems may not be in place to support a new leader coming in. He knows that they are about structures and systems these days but it does not seem like they are gaining constructive traction at Bowditch. He feels sure that the public does not want to rest all hopes at Bowditch on the new principal, because they have had those hopes before. Superintendent Ruiz agreed and clarified that she also meant that both leadership and teacher turnover are the two elements combined that need work. She reiterated that she would therefore continuously provide the committee with further updates. Dr. Walsh agreed wholeheartedly with the Superintendent's description of the factors involved at the Nathaniel Bowditch School:

- Negative effects of a change in population
- Increasing numbers of students who would be projected not to score well
- Amount of leadership change at the school and
- Faculty turnover

Members shared further insight, feedback, and discussion on the topic. Ms. Amaral stated that she strongly believes that Bowditch can change as long as the union, administration, the school committee, teachers, and administrative staff work together.

Presentations and Reports

Pillar 4: Strengthening Parent and Community Engagement Academic Parent Teacher Teams at the Bates School

Mr. Thomas Milaschewski, Principal of the Bates Elementary School, Jennifer Bartlett, 1st Grade Teacher, and Allison Sarno, 3rd Grade Teacher both also from the Bates School gave a presentation on *Pillar 4: Strengthening Parent and Community Engagement Academic Parent Teacher Teams* at the Bates School. Ms. Ann Berman, Music Teacher at Bates School and Vice President of the Salem Teachers Union was also present.

Principal Milaschewski reported that this is an initiative that was rolled out for the past three years. They found it to have a huge impact of student learning in their school. It could be a strong powerful way to really build strong partnerships with families at their school. They found, as a school, that they were doing a very good job of building relationships and connecting with families on a personal level. What they felt was missing was a way to connect those relationships to academic learning. They reached out to the Superintendent to ask for support in that area, and she connected them with the Otis Elementary School in East Boston – a school that received numerous accolades for their amazing work with family and community engagement. Principal Milaschewski talked of the recent MCAS highlights, 2016/2017 comparison of End-of-the-Year BAS Data and Academic Parent/Teacher Teams, which just finish their first round this year with a huge turnout. Principal Milaschewski shared further insight on the effectiveness of *Pillar 4: Strengthening Parent and Community Engagement Academic Parent Teacher Teams*. Ms. Sarno and Ms. Bartlett brought with them 3 folders containing materials of what is normally handed out to parents. They handed the folders to the members for review. Ms. Sarno and Ms. Bartlett walked members through the presentation.

Action Item

Deliberation and Vote on the Ratings for the Superintendent's Evaluation for the SY2016-2017

Discussion

Mr. Schultz tabled the Deliberation and Vote on the ratings for the Superintendent's evaluation for the school year 2016-2017 until the first recommendation scheduled for December 4th, 2017.

Finance Report

a. Approval of Warrants

November 16, 2017 in the amount of \$438,611.96

November 22, 2017 in the amount of \$182,727.18

Dr. Walsh motioned to approve the two warrants in the amounts listed on the Agenda. Ms. Wilson seconded the motion. The Motion was approved.

b. Budget Transfer Requests

There were no budget transfer requests

Subcommittee Reports

Policy Subcommittee

Deliberation and Vote on the Second Reading of Policy 6406 Voting Method

Discussion

Ms. Amaral informed members that there were just a couple more changes in Policy 6406 that was made between the last meeting and today. Members had been provided with a copy of those updates. Ms. Amaral asked if they had any questions to the changes. There were no questions. Ms. Amaral informed members that she would forward a copy, of the updated changes to the policy, to Mayor Driscoll and Mr. Fleming. Members can provide any other feedback if they wish, and she would make any changes as necessary before the next meeting.

Dr. Walsh motioned to approve the Second Reading of Policy 6406 Voting Method. Ms. Manning seconded the motion. The motion for Second reading of Policy 6406 was approved.

Deliberation and Vote on the Third Reading of the Recommendation of the Policy Subcommittee on the Revision to Policy 6101: Vision, Mission, and Core Values

Ms. Amaral motioned to approve the Third Reading of the recommendation of the Policy Subcommittee on the revision of Policy 6101: Vision, Mission, and Core Values. Dr. Walsh seconded the motion. The motion for Third reading of Policy 6101 was approved.

School Committee Concerns and Resolutions

Dr. Walsh expressed results of the Committee of the Whole meeting held this evening on the Student Assignment Policy. The Policy Subcommittee met and has accepted the motion to approve the first reading of this revised policy #5103. School Committee members agreed that the Student Assignment policy be considered for First Reading with the understanding that there may well be changes between now and the 2nd and 3rd reading. There are 3 Regular School Committee meetings left this year. Dr. Walsh continued that he believes it is their responsibility to have this done before the new committee.

Dr. Walsh moved the **Student Assignment Policy 5103** be accepted for **First Reading** this evening. Ms. Amaral seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

Dr. Walsh announced that there would be a fun Salem Children's Charity event on Tuesday, December 12, 2017 at Victoria Station in Salem, MA. Doors open at 5pm. The cost of the entrance is \$20. There will be a fabulous meal. There will be all sorts of raffles and prizes. All proceeds go towards Salem children in need. He hopes everyone can attend. Dr. Walsh thanked Mr. Schultz and the Mercy Tavern for their lovely monthly charitable donations to various nonprofits in Salem of which he is involved in two of them – *The House of the Seven Gables* and *Salem Children's Charity*. Dr. Walsh expressed that he is very appreciative of them both and thanked Mr. Schultz once again. Ms. Manning reminded everyone of her concern with reference to the school libraries, a concern she explained at the previous regular School Committee meeting. At the last meeting, Ms. Manning reiterated the importance of librarian and staffing school libraries with professionals who provide good instructional media to provide directional

support to students and teachers. She feels strongly about this and intends to continue on the issue throughout her time as School Committee member.

Questions and Comments From the Audience

Mr. Fawaz Abusharkh, of 4 Harrison Road, agreed with Dr. Walsh's earlier comment about what happened with the Bentley School and he supports his view. He also supports what Ms. Amaral said that the committee were not working together. Mr. Abusharkh stated that was not the case that politics played a role, and they are now in a new stage. Mr. Abusharkh continued that there is no designation this year, and this makes it more difficult. He is concerned that level 5 may happen next year without going to level 4.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the School Committee this evening, Dr. Walsh entertained the motion to adjourn. Ms. Amaral seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by:

Angelica Alayon, Secretary
Salem School Committee

Meeting Materials and Reports
School Committee Agenda November 20, 2017
Minutes of the November 4, 2017 Regular School Committee Meeting
Policy 6406 Voting Method
Policy 6101 Vision, Mission, and Core Values
Policy 5103 Controlled Choice Student Assignment Policy