

Salem School Committee
Committee of the Whole Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 18, 2019

A Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting of the Salem School Committee was held on Wednesday, September 18, 2019 at 6:00 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, Ms. Amanda Campbell, and Mayor Kimberley Driscoll

Members Absent: None

Others Present: Dr. Kathleen A. Smith, Superintendent, Kate Carbone, Assistant Superintendent, Jill Conrad, Chief of Systems Strategy, Kristin Shaver, Business Manager, David Rosenberg, Partner at Education Resource Strategies

Review and Discuss Findings From Resource Analysis by Education Resource Strategies (ERS)

Mr. David Rosenberg, Partner, Education Resource Strategies, reviewed context and goals used for the weeklong “budget blitz” data analysis that was conducted this past spring. The focus was to look deeper into some widely held beliefs about resource use in Salem Public Schools, discuss major opportunities to re-align resources in support of Salem Public Schools’ vision for all students, and outline potential next steps for Salem Public Schools.

Mr. Rosenberg provided an update on the work that was done, relative to the budget boot camp several months ago, and talked about structures on resources and priorities. Members thought about the budget process and upcoming negotiations and felt the need to ensure that Salem Public Schools has the resources needed, while leveraging those dollars to ensure it is driving their goals, particularly on student matters. There was general discussion around leveraging of assets. Members agreed to ensure priorities are being realized with the annual investments. Mr. Rosenberg shared a review of what they did over the course of the week, addressed and shared some widely held beliefs, and hypothesis heard from others, that lead to opportunities to rethink the way resources work.

Mr. Rosenberg explained what Education Resource Strategies (ERS) is and what they do. Mr. Rosenberg talked about the budget cost availability and expenditures, relative to what are seen around other districts in the state and country and presented on state and relevant comparison data, especially urban districts where ERS has worked. Mr. Rosenberg emphasized on the importance of strategic school design strategy, the system’s use of organized resources towards its goals and investments, and talked about finding readily accessible things that can make a difference: student-teacher ratios (how many students are assigned to teachers) at each schools and exact times teachers have (from grade to grade) to fully cooperate together. Mr. Rosenberg said this allowed to level-set on student performance and demographics as well as district, test conventional wisdom, and then focus on opportunities and shift resources evenly going forward.

Mayor Driscoll explained that the goal of this initial session is to share the information available today to help create a roadmap for potential questions and direction they may want to head in, as they think about upcoming priorities for items such as budget, collective bargaining, and shifting of resources, as needed. This is an opportunity to ensure that the work they are doing, as School Committee members, and the policies they are setting are being reflected in the budget. Mayor Driscoll talked about three key components: people, time, and money – to help ensure they are achieving their own vision statement around equity.

Mr. Rosenberg explained there are interesting and significant opportunities to rethink the use of resources to benefit students. Mr. Rosenberg presented on level setting and student achievement measures. High economic needs result in lower average performance in any given district. Mr. Rosenberg addressed transportation cost per pupil, central office size, shared services, and management functions. Mr. Rosenberg shared data and compared Salem with others on these elements. Key investment should be on transparency and flexibility for school leaders. Factors such as more time with high quality instruction - particularly for students who are far behind, the right curriculum, looking into whether teachers have the right supports, and having the right stability in school help lead to quality of

education for students. Mr. Rosenberg talked of the importance of teacher collaboration time with students and creative ways to support teacher collaboration.

Mr. Rosenberg presented on the rethinking of opportunities to shift resources, specifically on: time based on teacher and student collaboration, mix of roles on the assignment of school-based staff (number of full-time employees in schools based on number of students), how to use and invest in teachers in ways that line up with instructional improvement strategy, and what principals need in order to make decisions. Mr. Rosenberg spoke about the effectiveness on teacher assignment and job structure, as well as time and investment. There was general discussion on the rate of employee/staff turnover and teacher retention. Creating a great place to work and benefit offers help increase decisions to stay, in terms of the mathematical impact it has on students and contributes to the stability of schools.

There was a general discussion around investment, largely instruction, not in cost pay per person, other outside investments, nor time as well as the opportunity of lower class size in the early grades and advancement options for strong professional growth, and investments to have more supports in place. Teacher retention has an impact on what happens at schools. If non-renewal base were high, they would need to look into whether to help develop them well or think of how to recruit differently. Ms. Campbell spoke of research that shows identifying a potential teacher leader with potential school leaders versus verbally telling and actively developing them as teacher leaders and future school leaders the likelihood of retention declines. Mr. Rosenberg talked about high quality and alignment of support for principals. Mr. Rosenberg listed potential next steps.

Mayor Driscoll talked about staff time and retention and improvement on better test scores. Ms. Nuncio talked about looking into the Dual Language program. Ms. Wilson shared her thoughts on the compensation salary for teachers and suggested adding in extended years and time in schools. Mr. Fleming talked about the need for extended time at some schools and the need to stop short school days. Ms. Manning shared that it would benefit to involve parental community and everyone possible to understand the changes moving forward in order to work in accordance. Mr. Cruz shared said that is critically important for them to consider things they are doing with social emotional learning that other places are not doing and finding a way not to lose sight of that while they have a dialogue that impact deliberating instruction. Ms. Campbell talked about the achievement gap; in reference to the line of students in the four years of monitoring or that has never been identified as adults and suggested a closer look into this.

Members agreed to work on compiling a summary of expectations and frame a discussion on the theory of coherence as well as working to have an upcoming discussion with a community of internal staff and external community members. Ms. Manning talked about switching to a need allocation basis in terms of the budget and asked about a round table night, on leadership discussion, with principals. Ms. Carbone shared they have done one recently and thought to hold another round table with principals, possibly for October 21st. There was consensus to look into how to leverage the information from this evening, inform others, build coherence within and among the community, and have further engagement with the Equity subcommittee.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the School Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting this evening, Mr. Cruz motioned adjourn. Ms. Campbell seconded the motion. The motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 8:30pm.

Respectfully submitted by:

Angelica Alayon, Secretary
Salem School Committee